

Distinction between Existence and Essence in Avicenna's Ontology and Its Influence on Christian Philosophical Theology with a Focus on Aquinas' Views

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Abstract

Avicenna is an influential philosopher whose contributions in ontology led to the transformation of Greek philosophy into philosophical theology in the Middle Ages. He distinguished between existence and essence, divided beings into necessary and contingent beings, and believed in the objectivity of existence. This article discusses Avicenna's innovations in philosophical ontology and its influence on Christian ontology and theology, especially on Aquinas' thought. The article focuses on the distinction between existence and essence and its implications in Avicenna's philosophy and studies its influence on Aquinas' theology. It will show that although Aquinas, especially in his *De Ente et Essentia*, is influenced by Avicenna's ontology, his understanding of Avicenna's views are sometimes inaccurate, and this has led him to disagree with Avicenna in some cases.

Keywords: Existence, Essence (quiddity), Objectivity of existence, Avicenna, Aquinas.

Introduction

As a philosopher, Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) had immense influence on philosophy and theology in the Middle Ages by his own interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy. He attracted Muslim and Christian thinkers' attention to Peripatetic Philosophy by raising new issues in ontology and psychology (i.e., *'ilm al-nafs*) and theologically interpreting Greek philosophy, especially that of Aristotle. In the thirteenth century, some of Avicenna's works, including some parts of his *al-Shifā'* and its *Kitāb al-Nafs* were translated into Latin and discussed at the University of Paris. The attitudes of Albertus Magnus and his pupil Thomas Aquinas were affected by studying Avicenna's works. According to Kenny, Aquinas was influenced by Avicenna, to whose metaphysics Aquinas refers in the very first lines of his prologues (Kenny 2002, 36).

The distinction between essence (*māhiyyah*) and existence (*wujūd*) is especially among the most essential philosophical doctrines which Aquinas adopted in his early work entitled *De Ente et Essentia* under the influence of Avicenna (Hasse 2014, 3-6). In this book, Aquinas refers to Avicenna's remarks and accepts them in many cases. This shows Avicenna's obvious influence on the formation of Christian ontology and theology. Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate Avicenna's ontology and its divergences from Aristotle's ontology, along with its effect on Christian theology, especially in the case of the distinction between existence and essence and its implications, including the objectivity of existence. This distinction is not made in Aristotle's philosophy, but in Islamic philosophy, al-Fārābī and then Avicenna paid attention to it and viewed it as a basis for important classifications in ontology. In our view, this differentiation leads to a significant evolution in the structure of Aristotelian philosophy and Medieval theology.

In this paper, Avicenna's and Aquinas' views on the distinction between existence and essence are surveyed after discussing the related literature and explaining the meanings of "existence" and "essence." Then, their views are compared and analyzed. Here, the aim is to study the impact of this distinction on ontology and on Christian theology, as well as Avicenna's influence on Aquinas by referring to Avicenna's and Aquinas' writings.

Background

Many works have aimed at explaining Aquinas' views,¹ but none of them address the topic of this paper. Several writings have also highlighted Avicenna's and Averroes' impact on Christian philosophy,² especially on Aquinas concerning the subject of philosophy (i.e., the distinction between existence and essence) and the division of beings into *contingent* and *necessary* beings. However, they fail to adequately study, analyze, and compare Avicenna's and Aquinas' views regarding the distinction between existence and essence and its implications.

Avicenna's and Aquinas' Attitudes towards the Concepts of Existence and Essence

In Avicenna's view, the concept of existence is the most universal and self-evident concept. Contrary to essence, existence has no genus or differentia and thus is indefinable. Avicenna declares that it is impossible to provide a logical definition of existence, and the definitions that have been presented are of nominal type. Of course, the concept of existence is obvious for the human soul (Ibn Sīnā

1. See, for instance, Copleston (1955, vol. 2), Stump (2002), Kretzmann (1944), (Gilson 1950), and Elders (1990).

2. See, for instance, Burrell (1993) and Wippel (1990).

1984b, 496). Further, he explains that the intellect perceives existence, but not by definition or description, since existence has no genus or differentia, as it is the most universal concept (Ibn Sīnā 2004, 8). Furthermore, Avicenna claims that the concept of existent or existence is the first concept that comes to mind, and no other concept is clearer than this concept, and therefore it is indefinable. Besides, each concept or proposition is based on the concept of existence (Ibn Sīnā 1997, 41).

In Islamic philosophy, “existence” is used in three meanings: (1) the infinitive meaning (i.e., to be something extra-mental), (2) the copulative meaning (i.e., the copula “is” between the subject and predicate), and (3) the external reality that is the source of external effects. This latter meaning of existence, which stands in contrast to essence, is emphasized in Avicenna’s ontological discussions.

Aquinas, following Aristotle, indicates that “existent” has two meanings. In one meaning, it is divided into ten categories (i.e., it is either substance or accident). In the other one, it indicates the truth of propositions (Kenny 2002, 2). By distinguishing between existence and existent, Aquinas uses the words “*ens*” and “*esse*” for “existent” and “existence” respectively. In Aquinas’ view, *esse* is the very external reality, which is beyond the limits of concepts, and represents the external world. The sentences “The unicorn has a horn” and “The cats exist” vary because the latter indicates a real property in cats. For Aquinas, *esse* is not simply an understanding of existence; rather, it denotes what really exists (Davis 2002, 25).

According to Elders, Aquinas emphatically confirms that being is the first concept which comes to mind and mentions that Avicenna thought accordingly (Elders 1993, 39). As Owens has pinpointed, in Aquinas’ view, two meanings of “Being” are combined. It is assumed

that a thing has "Being" and is "a being" simultaneously. The ens, the subject, can demonstrate what a thing is and what it has (Owens 1958, 36). Considering God's utterances in *Torah*, Aquinas knows God as pure existence and the instance of esse (Aquinas, *STh*, vol.1, q.19, a.2). This is a notion which has no place in Aristotle's philosophy, because, in his view, there is no instance for objective existence (Being) apart from the substance and accident; however, any existent (being) is either a substance or an accident. Therefore, Aristotle's God is the supreme substance, while God in Aquinas' view is the supreme existence (Being). This concept of existence, which is in contrast to substance and accident, is derived from Avicenna's views.

Aquinas, like Avicenna, conceives existence as the most inclusive and self-evident concept. He reiterates Avicenna's view that Being is what the mind comprehends first (Walton 1950, 339-95). In fact, Aquinas believes that attributing existence to creatures and to God is not by equivocation nor by way of univocation, while Avicenna presumes it to be univocation. Further, Aquinas indicates that the names applied to God and creatures are predicated of God analogically, not equivocally or univocally (Aquinas, *SCG* vol.1, ch. 34).

Furthermore, Copleston has explained that in Aquinas' theory of analogy two realities are occasionally compared in relation to one concept. However, the comparison is infrequently made between the two proportions (e.g., between the relation of corporeal vision to the eyes and that of intellectual vision to the mind). The attributes of perfection and existence are both predicated of God and creatures while they represent different meanings (Copleston 1950, 2:354). It is noteworthy that although the concept of "existence" is univocally

predicated of God and creatures in Avicenna's viewpoint, its predication is gradational, not univocal. The classificatory concepts are univocally predicated of their instances, while there are "intensity and weakness" and "priority and posteriority" in the predication of existence (Ibn Sīnā 1984a, 38).

The abovementioned discussion can respond to Aquinas' objection to Avicenna in predicating existence of God. Moreover, Aquinas' theory of analogy is unable to resolve the problem, because every equivocal term, by rational and logical restriction, is either predicated of two things in two meanings or two things in one meaning, while the instances of that univocal meaning may vary, and there is no third alternative. The former is called equivocation, while the latter is referred to as univocation. Therefore, Aquinas' theory of analogy on predicating existence can be referred to as "the graded universal concept" in Avicenna's terminology.

Avicenna's and Aquinas' Views on Essence

In Avicenna's view, the essence has three meanings (Ibn Sīnā 1997, 201-2): (1) the logical definition of something (i.e., "quid?" the answer to the question "What is it?" consisting of genus and differentia), (2) that by which a thing is considered what it is, and (3) quiddity *qua* quiddity. Avicenna negates from God the first meaning of essence. In his view, the second meaning of essence is attributable to God (Ibn Sīnā 1997, 201). Avicenna believes that existence and essence are identical in God; in other words, God has no essence in its first meaning. In the third meaning, the essence is an ideational thing, which has no mental or objective existence. In Avicenna's words, "quiddity *qua* quiddity is not something save itself, and then it is neither existent nor non-existent" (Ibn Sīnā 1997, 202).

Aquinas uses several expressions for essence or quiddity. He uses the word “*quidditas*” for a thing when it is defined and is a mental intelligible, while he employs the word “*essentia*” for a thing when that thing is the subject for the predicate “existence.” He assumes three instances for essence or quiddity in relation to existence (Aquinas 1983, 3):

1. The essence of God, which is the same as His existence. For some philosophers, God has no essence, because He is not under any genus.
2. The essence or quiddity in intellectual substances, whose existence is distinct from their essence, though they do not have any matter. Additionally, such existence is inherent in the form of those substances.
3. Essence in the things compounded of form and matter, whose existence is derived from other beings.

Obviously, Aquinas derives the first and the second meanings of essence from Avicenna. However, no trace of Avicenna's definition exists in Aquinas' third meaning of essence. The negligence of this point directed Aquinas and his commentators toward a mistaken attribution of the idea of “the accident of existence to essence” to Avicenna. As previously mentioned, the quiddity *qua* quiddity in Avicenna's view is not existent nor non-existent, and thus it needs existence for actualization in the external world; therefore, existence is an accident for essence in this meaning.

Distinction between Existence and Essence in Avicenna's Philosophy

Some writers suppose that Aristotle discusses the distinction between existence and essence in his *Metaphysics* (e.g., in books VII and VIII).

Conversely, a precise consideration reveals that Aristotle only seeks to discuss the divisions of being, such as the division into substance and accident, and pays no attention to the concept of existence distinct from essence (Aristotle 1966, book VII, ch.10). In his opinion, “being,” which is the subject of philosophy, is considered either as substance or accident. According to Aristotle, one signification of being is what a thing is, which is a particular thing, while the other is the quality or quantity or each of the things which are predicated accordingly (Aristotle 1966, book VII, ch.10).

Clearly, Aristotle differentiates between existence and essence. Although this differentiation is related to the logical distinction between the concepts of existence and essence, Avicenna takes it to ontology. But as Izutsu has stated, in Islamic thought, the thesis of distinction between quiddity and existence was explicitly asserted by al-Fārābī. This idea can be traced to Aristotle, but the role of such distinction in metaphysics is what separates the two thinkers from each other. In Aristotle’s philosophical system, everything is assumed in the concept of “essence,” because an essence being real means nothing less than its existence. In other words, Aristotle is concerned with a world which is actually existent instead of the one that is possibly thought not to exist. As a result, there is no place for distinction or relation between quiddity and existence in his metaphysical system (Izutsu 2009, 88-89).

Avicenna explains such a differentiation as knowing that you occasionally understand the meaning of triangle though you may doubt whether or not it has objective existence: whereas you know that the triangle includes three lines and a surface, you may not know that it has objective existence (Ibn Sīnā 1974, 3:13). Therefore, everything has a specific reality which is named “quiddity” and which differs from existence.

In addition, Avicenna addresses quiddity in the sense of either “that by which a thing is what it is,” namely, “essence,” or what comes in the answer to the question “What is it?” (Ibn Sīnā 1997, 201).

The second meaning of quiddity is considered the common usage of quiddity in Avicenna's works, which is applied to the genus and species. In this sense, quiddity has a special place in Avicenna's ontology, because knowing the levels of Being is based on knowing the essence. Contrary to contingent beings, which have existence and quiddity, the Necessary Being is even supposed to be an essence with no quiddity by definition. Further, as regards its quiddity, a Necessary Being is indifferent to existence and non-existence and thus has no necessity.

Distinction between Existence and Essence in Christian Philosophy

During the Middle Ages, Avicenna's ontology, especially the distinction between existence and essence, the univocality of existence, and the principle of material individuality, appeared in Christian philosophy and theology. Albert the Great discussed the distinction between essence and existence, the emanation of vertical intellects, and many other philosophical issues discussed by Avicenna. Furthermore, Aquinas took Avicenna's ontology seriously and considered it the basis of ontology in Christian theology in spite of his disagreement with Avicenna. He was influenced by Avicenna's ontology, especially in the case of distinction between the two above-mentioned concepts, more than other philosophers. Aquinas was acquainted with Avicenna's works, particularly his *Al-Ilāhīyyāt min kitāb al-Shifā'*. This book, translated into Latin in the twelfth century, was used by Aquinas in most of his discussions (Wippel 1990, 53).

According to Hasse, the distinction between essence and existence, understood from Avicenna's metaphysics in the Latin West, is viewed as one of the most influential philosophical doctrines of Arabic origin. Moreover, Aquinas accepts Avicenna's distinction in his early works (Hasse 2014, 603). Additionally, he benefits from Avicenna's *Al-Ilāhīyyāt min kitāb al-Shifā'* in his two seminal works (i.e., *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*), agrees with Avicenna in most of his views, and occasionally calls him his master.

In addition, Avicenna's influence on Aquinas is manifested in the latter's *De Ente et Essentia*. This book represents the framework of Aquinas' ontology, which is preserved in those of his works written during his philosophical maturity.

In general, Aquinas constructed Aristotelian thought by considering Avicenna's and Averroes' commentaries in light of the scriptures. Following these two philosophers, Aquinas perceives the subject of philosophy as "being *qua* being" or "ens" or "ens commune" (i.e., the absolute existent) in his own words. Like Avicenna, Aquinas disagrees with Averroes' view of the subject of philosophy as the immaterial being or the divine essence (Wippel 1990, 53-57).

In fact, Aquinas' attitude toward the concept of existence distinguishes him from Greek philosophers, although the origin of his approach is Avicenna's view of existence. In addition, in Aristotle's philosophy, although the subject of philosophy is being *qua* being, Aristotle is entirely concerned with existent substances and pays no attention to the concept of existence as distinct from the essence and substance of things. Accordingly, God is considered an intellectual substance in his philosophy. Further, Aquinas separates his way from Greek philosophers by emphasizing the distinction between the

concepts of existence and essence, as well as stipulating the primacy of existence in God and other things. In his view, God is the same as existence, and theological philosophy is highlighted as philosophy of ontology rather than the science of substances, which is the basis of Aristotle's philosophy.

Furthermore, Aquinas discusses the distinction between existence and essence as the yardstick of the need of essence/quiddity for existence. According to him, although simple substances are pure forms with no matter, they have no pure actuality, due to the distinction between essence and Being, while they are somehow potential; moreover, pure actuality occurs to simple substances externally and is combined with their essence, because existence is not a part of their quiddity or essence. However, a thing has no form or differentia if it is pure being/existence, and thus its essence is the same as Being, and this is the very first cause (*causa prima*) (Aquinas 1983, 28).

So far, it was shown that the concepts of existence and essence are distinct from each other. Now, we can inquire about the relation between these two concepts in mind and reality.

Avicenna's View on the Relation between Existence and Quiddity

As Avicenna asserts, "existence is not a quiddity for something or a part of the quiddity of a thing (i.e., the things which have quiddity); additionally, existence fails to enter in the concept of quiddity, although it occurs to quiddity" (Ibn Sīnā 1974, 3:61). This citation explicitly demonstrates that existence is not quiddity or a constituent of quiddity, but it occurs to quiddity. Therefore, when it is said that existence is an accident for quiddity, it does not imply that such

existence is a categorical accident which occurs to a pre-existent subject. In other words, Avicenna's remarks indicate that quiddity, which is a contingent being in itself, needs external existence for its very actualization.

To explain why existence is not considered one of the corollaries of quiddity, Avicenna declares that such corollaries are effects, and the actualization of an effect is posterior to the actualization of its cause, and the existence of quiddity fails to be its effect, because that leads to a vicious circle (Ibn Sīnā 1992, 109). Evidently, for Avicenna, the existence and quiddity of things are not two things in reality; it is our mind that distinguishes between these two concepts by a specific analysis and wonders what the relation between these concepts is in reality (i.e., in the extra-mental world). In fact, Avicenna asks whether existence occurs to quiddity, as vision is related to corporeal beings, or existence is a corollary of quiddity like possibility; otherwise, a third way is possible. It is very surprising how Averroes misunderstood Avicenna's clear position and attributed the idea of the accidentality of existence for quiddity to him, and then criticized it! Averroes supposed that Avicenna's position is that quiddity should exist first, and then existence occurs to it, while quiddity has no actualization prior to its existence (Averroes 1986, 75).

As a result, the very misconception persuaded thinkers like Aquinas to attribute such an idea to Avicenna, while the latter explicitly indicates that by the accidentality of existence he means analytic accidentality rather than external accidentality (Ibn Sīnā 2000, 186). Avicenna assumes that if existence is the consequential property of quiddity, then quiddity should be existent prior to its existence so that existence can occur to it, and this leads to a vicious circle. Moreover, according to Avicenna, the existence of accidents is their

being in their substrata, except for existence itself as it needs no other existence for its actualization. In other words, existence requires no existence, and the meaning of the accidentality of existence for substratum implies that its being in substratum is the very existence of its substratum, while the accidentality of other accidents depends on the existence of their substrata (Ibn Sīnā 2000, 186).

Aquinas' View on the Relation between Existence and Essence

In Aquinas' view, existence is necessary in the case of God, because the divine essence is the same as existence, whereas in the case of other existents (beings), which are recipients of existence, what receives existence should be other than existence. Does Aquinas view the distinction between existence and essence as real and objective or conceptual and ideational? According to Copleston, this depends on the meaning of that distinction. If it means that existence and essence are two separate things in reality, then there is no doubt that Aquinas has no such belief. Conversely, if that definition indicates an extramental distinction, it is regarded as the basis of Aquinas' philosophy, although he is unable to express its quality (Copleston 1950, 2:333).

However, Aquinas criticized Avicenna's view and remarked that Avicenna had recognized existence as an accident, and thus he believed that Avicenna's view was wrong. He held that, for Avicenna, the existence of a thing should differ from its essence, and therefore existence (Being) is something added to the essence (Aquinas 1996, 204).

Some commentators of Aquinas' philosophy, such as Copleston, have had the same misconception about Avicenna. In Copleston's view, Avicenna considered existence as an accident for quiddity,

while Aquinas supposed quiddity as the recipient of existence and rejected the accidentality of existence to quiddity. Of course, for him, reception does not imply that quiddity exists before receiving existence; rather, the essence of a thing is actualized by existence (Copleston 1950, 2:334).

Contrarily, according to Izutsu, this conception of Avicenna's view is evidently a misconception, because Avicenna himself distinguishes between two types of accidents. Although Avicenna uses the term "accident" for describing the relation between existence and quiddity, he does not consider it an accident like whiteness (Izutsu 2009, 120).

Averroes believed that, by existence, Avicenna only meant an ordinary accident like whiteness, and criticized him accordingly (Ibn Rushd 1998, 10). Aquinas inherited Averroes' misconception and his wrong criticism and thought that existence is an ordinary accident, while Avicenna explicitly differentiated between existence, as an accident, and the other accidents. In other words, in Avicenna's view, the existence of all accidents is their existence in their substrata, while existence is different from that *per se*. Avicenna holds that quiddity has three aspects: quiddity as mental existence, quiddity as objective and external existence, and quiddity *qua* quiddity (*al-māhiyyatu min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) (Ibn Sīnā 1997, 201-2). However, the third aspect (*qua*) of quiddity was not obvious for Aquinas. In Avicenna's works, the accidentality of existence for quiddity refers to the third aspect (*qua*) of quiddity, which is a rational analysis, and thus quiddity has no actualization, whereas in Avicenna's view, quiddity as an objective and external existent is related to existence.

However, Aquinas follows Avicenna with regard to the divisions of existence. Classifying existents into contingent and necessary beings is one of the most important divisions of existence (existent),

which stems from the distinction between existence and quiddity. In addition, it is a reason for things' need for a producing cause. In Aquinas' and Avicenna's view, this producing cause is God, who is the same as existence and gives Being to all the existents.

Aquinas presents five proofs for the existence of God. His third proof, influenced by Avicenna's argument from contingency and necessity, is briefly discussed as follows (Aquinas, *STh* vol.1, q.2, a.3). Natural things are contingent in their relation to existence and non-existence. Furthermore, such things are in the realm of generation and corruption, while they have no necessity in their relation to existence and non-existence. However, they may be non-existent in a time. If this condition prevails, then it can simultaneously be non-existent in a time. Therefore, the non-existent thing requires a cause to give it existence, because non-existence cannot be turned into existence. Thus, all existents cannot be contingent beings, and therefore a Necessary Being exists. This Necessary Being either acquires its necessity from another being or it is necessary *per se*. In the former case, it should ultimately depend on a necessary beginning, because the infinite regression of the causes is impossible.

In brief, beings are either contingent or necessary, and contingent beings need the Necessary Being in their existence.

The Reality and Objectivity of Existence

As previously explained, the distinction between existence and quiddity is a metaphysical distinction in Avicenna's view, as they do not refer to two distinct entities in the external world. However, such a distinction prepares the ground to ask whether it is existence or quiddity that is the origin of effects in the world. Although Avicenna himself does not raise such a question, his view can be gleaned from his words.

In our view, Avicenna's words in his various works indicate the primacy of existence, though some issues in his works are based on the primacy of quiddity. Discussing this subject is beyond the task of this paper, although giving a brief snapshot of it is useful.

As previously discussed, Avicenna neither directly discussed the primacy of existence or quiddity nor was he able to defend the primacy of each of these concepts. However, some of his statements imply the primacy of existence. Avicenna first addresses the causes of quiddity (matter and form) and those of the existence of a thing and then indicates that all these causes depend on the efficient cause and finally emphasizes that the agent is the cause for the causes of the constitution of quiddity, because it is the cause of existence (Ibn Sīnā 1974, 3:14). For example, the corporeal being is composed of matter and form, although its composition is posterior to the issuance of existence from the agent. Therefore, the existence of a thing rather than its quiddity is the origin of its effects.

Moreover, Avicenna believes that "what has quiddity is an effect, and all things save the Necessary Being have quiddities" (Ibn Sīnā 1997, 370). Besides, he declares that quiddities are viewed as contingent beings *per se*, and existence occurs to quiddities only from outside (Ibid.). In addition, Avicenna claims that "if it is asked whether existence is existent *per se*, then the answer is that the reality of existence is nothing but being existent" (Ibn Sīnā 2000, 114).

Obviously, Avicenna's statement is about the objective reality of existence rather than its ideational and mental concept. Avicenna assumes that what realizes first is the existence of a thing rather than its quiddity. Further, the reality of existence is regarded as the origin of effects and even the cause of the composition of the parts of quiddity. In the case of God, the reality of existence lacks quiddity and

substance, while in the case of contingent beings, it accompanies the quiddity in the sense that the quiddity is abstracted from contingent beings.

As explained by Avicenna, when something is issued from the Transcendent Origin, it finds a different identity different from it, and two concepts arise: (1) that which is issued from the Origin, which is existence, and (2) that which accompanies the existence, which is called quiddity. According to him, quiddity is a corollary of existence in its being, whereas existence is mentally a corollary of quiddity, because it is a quality for quiddity in mind (Ibn Sīnā 2000, 245).

As previously mentioned, in Avicenna's view, what realizes first is "existence" rather than quiddity. He stipulates that quiddities are contingent beings *per se* and existence occurs to them from outside. Therefore, the First Being has no quiddity, and the essences which have quiddity receive their existence from Him. Accordingly, He is the pure existence (Ibn Sīnā 2000, 496). This indicates that the effect, which issues from the Creator and Maker, is existence rather than quiddity. In Avicenna's view, all things, in terms of their essences, deserve non-existence if not belonging to the Necessary Being. He believes that "every Necessary Being is the pure reality, because the reality of everything is its quality of existence, by which the thing is actualized" (Ibn Sīnā 1984a, 11). Therefore, believing in the reality of existence and the existential dependence of all existents on God, as well as confirming His existence as the Being-giver cause is an important result of the distinction between existence and quiddity.

Avicenna believes in the distinction between existence and quiddity and maintains that all existents, as contingent beings, have quiddity. Following Avicenna, Aquinas holds that the concept of

existence has an objective instance. He explicitly speaks of this instance in the case of God.

In Aquinas' opinion, God is the pure existence, and "*esse*" represents the reality of God's existence. Clearly, this was a problem which did not occupy the minds of any Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle. One of Aquinas' commentators has remarked that the difference between Aristotle and Aquinas relies on the fact that Aristotle holds no real distinction between "Being" (existence) and "being" (existent). He believes that beings are either material or immaterial. In immaterial beings, there is no matter or capacity, and therefore they cannot be generated or corrupted and are actual and eternal. However, by differentiating between Being and beings, along with holding that all beings, whether material or immaterial, have essence and quiddity, Aquinas believes that even immaterial beings require a Being-giver cause, because their essence is separate from their existence. This belief opens the way for approving the existence of God as the efficient cause. Therefore, Aquinas perceives God as Being (existence) under the influence of the scriptures and Avicenna (Kretzmann 1944, 46).

In the case of the primacy of existence or quiddity in other things, Aquinas has no explicit statement. However, as was mentioned earlier, a vast body of evidence supports the claim that Avicenna believes in the primacy of existence.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing discussions, the following results are achieved:

1. Avicenna separated his way from Aristotle by distinguishing between existence and quiddity. Additionally, he proposed several

sophisticated philosophical issues by adhering to the reality of existence. The problem of distinction between existence and quiddity introduced some questions in philosophy and modified the structure of Greek theology. This distinction between the two mentioned concepts has several consequences, including dividing beings (existents) into contingent and necessary, elevating the efficient cause to the level of the Being-giver cause rather than the cause of motion, changing God's role from the First Mover to the Creator, and finally believing in the providence and governance of God over all things.

2. These issues were discussed by Aquinas, leading to an evolution in ontology and philosophical theology in the Middle Ages. Albert the Great and Aquinas were influenced by Avicenna's philosophy, especially in ontology. In addition, Aquinas wrote his *De Ente et Essentia* by studying Avicenna's works on ontology and revolutionized philosophical theology by distinguishing between existence and essence (quiddity).

3. Avicenna's God, unlike the God of Greek philosophers, is the same as existence and beyond substances. His God creates all things (beings) out of nothing and gives existence to all things. Likewise, the God of Christian philosophers like Albert the Great and Aquinas, due to being influenced by the scriptures and Avicenna's works, is a pure and perfect existence, in whose essence and existence there is no distinction and His existence is necessary.

4. Following Avicenna, Aquinas made the distinction between existence and existents and considered all existents, other than God, composed of existence and quiddity (essence). However, he failed to analyze the problem regarding the real or only mental differentiation between existence and essence (quiddity), while for Avicenna the

quiddity differs from existence only in mind. Further, these two concepts have an existential unity in the external world in the sense that quiddity exists extra-mentally following existence, whereas existence exists *per se*.

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