NAZARİYAT

Qutb al-Din al-Razi and the Problem of Universals: A Fourteenth-Century Critique of Avicenna's Theory of Natural Universals*

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Abstract: The problem of universals has been, and continues to be, one of the most important problems in philosophy. Although discussed by a variety of Arabic thinkers, it was Avicenna (d. 1037) who made the most significant contributions by reinterpreting the crucial terms of the debate in accordance with his notion of quiddity *qua* itself. He argued that a non-conditioned quiddity—also known as the natural universal (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*)—existed in external particulars in the way that a part exists in the whole. This paper examines Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 766/1364) criticisms of this theory..

Keywords: Problem of universals, Avicenna, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, natural universals, natures

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Scholars of medieval Arabic thought have long been aware that Avicenna rejected the theory of Platonic Forms (Ar. *al-muthul al-aflāṭūniyya*) and instead averred that natures and essences exist in the external particulars that instantiate them.[1] However, although it may be argued that his understanding of the immanent or part-theory of forms was itself an elaboration of Aristotle's own thinking, it is worth cautioning against a full reductionism; for Avicenna's treatment of universal natures, both from their logical and metaphysical points of view, as well as his discussion more specifically on the so-called ontological "problem of universals," bears only the slightest resemblance to the discussions and debates of his ancient predecessors. And though he was responding to what was no doubt a continuous historical tradition, Avicenna reconfigured previous thinking by taking into account the bearing that his own distinction between quiddity (*māhiyya*) and existence (*wujūd*) had on the problem. What is more, Avicenna provides a meticulous re-evaluation of the various senses of the term "universal" (*al-kullī*) itself, an undertaking based on his realization that the pure concept of the quiddities of things may be conceptualized in isolation from all other attendant properties and characterizations.

While it may be true that Avicenna forcefully rejects the extramental existence of universals *qua* universals, regardless of whether these be separated forms (Plato) or quasi-universals embedded in particulars, he nonetheless resists a total rejection of the external existence of certain bare concepts, instead arguing that quiddities *per se* do exist as parts of natural particulars. Avicenna's solution is in part inspired by, and in part a response to, the views of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who offered what appear to be contradictory views on the existence of universals, as well as the views of the tenth-century Jacobite Christian philosopher and theologian Yaḥyā Ibn ʿAdī (d. 363/974), who advocated that universals could have a third mode of being (*wujūd*) that is neither extramental existence (*al-wujūd fī l-aʿyān*) nor mental existence (*al-wujūd fī l-ʿaql*).[2]

1 A considerable amount of scholarship already exists on various aspects of Avicenna's theory of natural universals (sing. *al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*) and his doctrine of *universalia* more generally, as well as the reception of his ideas among later thinkers in the Islamic tradition. See Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Chapter on Universals in the *Isagoge* of his *Shifāʾ*," in *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, ed. A. T. Welch and P. Cachia (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979), 34-56; idem., "Quiddity and Universality in Avicenna," in *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 77-88; Toshihiko Izutsu, "The Problem of Quiddity and Natural Universal in Islamic Metaphysics," in *Etudes philosophique* (GIBO, 1974), 131-77; Muhammad U. Faruque, "Mullā Ṣadrā on the Problem of Natural Universals," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 27 (2017): 269-302; Raja Bahlul, "Avicenna and the Problem of Universals," *Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 21, no. 1-2 (2009): 3-25.

2 See Robert Sharples, "Alexander of Aphrodisias on Universals: Two Problematic Texts," *Phronesis* 50 (2005): 43-55; Riin Serkel, "Alexander of Aphrodisias's Account of Universals and Its Problems,"

Yet despite his towering influence on later Arabic philosophy not every medieval Arabic thinker agreed with Avicenna's solution to this age-old problem. Indeed, although our understanding of his philosophy in general and his solution in particular to the problem of universals, as bequeathed by Porphyry, has advanced greatly, almost nothing of great significance has been written on Quṭb al-Din al-Rāzī's (d. 766/1364) anti-Avicennan response. This fourteenth-century Persian thinker, like his European counterpart William of Ockham (d. 1347), methodically rejected the existence of "common natures" and natural universals *in re*.[3] The decision to focus of on al-Rāzī is not therefore an arbitrary one, for no Islamic scholar among those who criticized Avicenna's contention that natures exist in their extramental particulars has been more historically critical of Avicenna's position than he. Not only did he criticize Avicenna's views, he also set the stage for all future discussions, be they in the form of critique or defense, on the epistemological and ontological problems surrounding the existence of natural universals. In order to fill this gap in our current understanding of the reception of Avicenna's ideas in the Islamic East, I will begin by briefly outlining his doctrine of universals and then focus on the main author whose opinions constitute the bulk of this paper.

I. Avicenna On (Natural) Universals

When dealing with the problem of universals it is customary to begin with a clear statement as to what the problem is exactly.[4] This has been assisted by the fact the whenever late antique and medieval scholars speak of a so-called "problem of universals," what is usually being referred to is a series of questions posed by the Neoplatonist thinker Porphyry of Tyre (234-305). In his *Isagoge*, Porphyry poses the following questions:

Journal of the History of Philosophy, vol. 49, no. 3 (2011): 297-314. For Ibn 'Adī's contributions, see Stephen Menn and Robert Wisnovsky, "Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī on the Four Scientific Questions Concerning the Three Kinds of Existence: *Editio Princeps* and Translation," *MIDEO* 29 (2012): 73-96.

3 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's criticisms of Avicenna have been mentioned previously in the studies of Toshihiko Izutsu ("The Problem of Quiddity") and Muhammad U. Faruque ("Mullā Ṣadrā on the Problem of Natural Universals"). However, neither study focuses on al-Rāzī as such but are rather concerned with thinkers of much later periods.

4 A plethora of studies exists on the history of the problem of universals in Western scholarship. For a detailed historical overview, see Alain de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1996). Though outdated, Meyrick H. Carré's *Realists and Nominalists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967; first published 1946) provides a good overview of the debate between realists and nominalists in Latin Scholasticism.

> (*a*) Whether genera and species are real or are situated in bare thoughts alone, (*b*) whether as real they are bodies or incorporeals, and (*c*) whether they are separated or in sensible particulars and have their reality in connection with them.[5]

Here, the first leading question deals directly with the "ontological" nature of the problem, namely, the metaphysical problem of whether universals exist outside our minds and independently of being thought, or whether they are purely conceptual in nature. If we decide on the "real" existence of universals, then the second question seeks to clarify whether this type of existence is bodily/corporeal or immaterial. And supposing we say that universals exist immaterially, the third question seeks greater clarification on the nature of this immaterial existence, namely, whether universals, as immaterial beings, exist in material entities or separately from them.

A quick summation of Avicenna's responses would run something like the following: First, if by genera and species one means universal ideas *qua* universals (i.e. concepts predicable of many things), then these most definitely do not exist externally, but are, so to speak, "bare thoughts alone." But if, on the other hand, one intends by the term "universal" an idea or meaning (*mafhūm*) "by itself" (i.e. without the notion of it being predicable of many), then this, according to Avicenna, does exist extramentally. Therefore, in addition to being real, extramentally existing essences are also "incorporeal" inasmuch as they are according to his reckoning, "non-sensible" (*ghayr maḥsūs*) to the external senses. Hence, there exists something in the extramental world that is both (*a*) incorporeal and (*b*) not a universal *qua* universal.[6] Based on an intricate formulation of the concept of quiddity (*māhiyya*)

5 Porphyry of Tyre, *Isagoge*, V1.2.1, ed. and trans. Paul V. Spade in: *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1994), 1. A typical account in medieval Arabic philosophy of the difference between Plato's and Aristotle's views on the nature and existence of universals is provided by the eleventh-century Nestorian thinker Abū al-Faraj Abd Allāh Ibn al-Ṭayyib (d. 980/1043) in his commentary on the *Isagoge*: "Plato, however, believed that genera and species have triple (stages of) existence: existence 'before the many.' His belief was that there are forms existing with God before He created His creatures […] Aristotle, however, did not follow these views (of Plato), but followed what we mentioned at first, namely that a form exists 'in the many,' like natural genera and species. Also, Aristotle did not believe in this doctrine (of Plato), for he did not believe that genera and species exist, but rather that that which exists consists of these sensible and particular individuals. The form which exists 'after the many' are the logical genera and logical species. These are the forms abstracted by the soul from likenesses which it finds in natural things alone. Aristotle believes that these alone (i.e. the abstracted forms) are genera and species." (Kwame Gyekye, trans., *Arabic Logic: Ibn al-Ṭayyib's Commentary on Porphyry's Eisagoge* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1979], 38-39).

6 Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. Maḥmūd Shihābī Khurasānī (Tehran: Inteshārāt-e Dāneshghāh-e Tehrān, 1390 SH), *namaṭ* IV, *faṣl* 1, p. 104.

and the different analytical ways in which they can be considered, Avicenna denies both the possibility that such incorporeal realities exist as separated Forms and the view that multiple particulars all "participate" in a single form that they each happen to have in common.[7]

In order to appreciate why both the Platonic and participatory theories of universals are false, it is important that Avicenna's views on the concept of quiddity be explained more thoroughly, since what he has to say about this is crucial not only for his own philosophical understanding of the problem of universals, but also in so far as the historical debates that came after him are concerned.

A convenient starting point is Avicenna's description of the universal as something that is *mushtarak fīhi*, meaning an idea that is "common to" or "shared by" many things. This description lends itself to a possible misinterpretation, however, which is why one must stress Avicenna's claim that a universal is not one thing shared among many particulars *as one thing*.[8] Otherwise, this would imply that a single nature occurs in multiple places at the same time, which leads to the

7 On Avicenna's rejection of the Platonic Theory of Forms, see Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Critique of Platonists in Book VII, Chapter 2 of the Metaphysics of his *Healing*" in: *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One. Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. James Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 359-64. The crux of Avicenna's argument can be summarized as follows: A single quiddity such as human can be considered in two ways when apprehended as a meaning abstracted from its attendant qualities and properties. The first is human as a non-conditioned quiddity (*al-māhiyya lā bi-sharṭ*), which according to Avicenna entails that even though it is considered just by itself, the quiddity "human" may (or may not) still nonetheless be conjoined to other extraneous meanings. It is, cognitively speaking, distinct, but not necessarily ontologically distinct, from the extraneous properties it possesses. The second is human as a negatively conditioned quiddity (*al-māhiyya bi-sharṭ lā shay'*). Like the previous, "human" here is an abstracted meaning inasmuch as it is not joined to another concept. But unlike the former case it is being intellectually apprehended alongside another concept that is subsequently being negated from it. The error of the Platonist, according to Avicenna, is that she surmises that the latter consideration of human (i.e. as a negatively conditioned quiddity) necessitates that not only is its cognitive form distinct from the conceptualization of particular humans, but that its ontological mode of being is separate from them also, thereby necessitating an independent mode of existence—the realm of Platonic Forms—that is both distinct and separate from the existence of particular human beings like Zayd.

8 There is, as Avicenna alludes (*al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, IV.1, p. 104), a distinction to be made between (*a*) humanity in the form of a single nature and (*b*) a single instance of humanity. The former is neither one nor many, whereas the latter, by virtue of being something enumerated, has numerical identity (*al-waḥdat al-'adadiyya*). This point is made even more explicit by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), who writes that "human, inasmuch as it is a single reality (*min ḥaythu huwa wāḥid al-ḥaqīqa*), is not the same as a single [instance of] human (*al-insān al-wāḥid*). The reason for this is that the meaning of the first is human inasmuch as it is a single nature, but not from the perspective that it is an animal, or rational, or one, or anything else besides. The meaning of the second is human conjoined with oneness. The first is common to many, but the second isn't." See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. Ḥasanzādah al-Āmulī (Qom: Bustān-e Ketāb, 1391 SH), 2:542-43.

absurd consequence that it is attended by contradictory qualities, as would be the case, for example, if "animal" were a single nature shared by horses and humans alike. Given that this would then mean that "animal" is both two-legged and not two-legged at the same time, Avicenna rejects the opinion that surmises that the existence of a single universal is spread among multiple particulars. In other words, he rejects one version of the participatory theory of universals that later Arabic sources claim was advocated by one of his contemporaries.

The idea that a single universal is both actually whole and undivided among many particulars is, therefore, impossible in Avicenna's view. If the whole of humanity is somehow entirely present in Zayd and 'Amr and yet simultaneously whole and undivided, then either only one individual is wholly and fully human, or the nature of humanity is no longer whole and undivided. As a result, there would no longer be just one humanity, but many humanities numerically multiplied across many individuals.[9] Whatever the case, both arguments show that a nature that is one in number cannot simultaneously be present and participated in by multiple individuals.

By the same token, however, Avicenna also rejects that a nature such as "animal" is *qua* itself a universal and therefore logically capable of being said of many. Otherwise every individual animal, he argues, would be predicable of many by virtue of being animal in the first instance, which is clearly impossible.[10] By showing that neither one or many, nor universality or particularity, belong to the natures or quiddities of things themselves, Avicenna is able to separate and isolate the bare concept of a thing from its added considerations, thereby creating the historically pertinent notion of the pure concept of quiddity in itself (*al-māhiyya min ḥaythu hiya*). "Animal" *qua* itself is just animal, not one nor many, not universal nor particular, not even existent or non-existent, but just itself.

Avicenna's remarks about the pure concept of quiddity are, as yet, entirely focused on the epistemo-logical considerations of a quiddity only, having nothing to do with their ontological status. Indeed, what makes his doctrine of quiddity *qua* itself historically significant is precisely the fact that one can grasp a thing's nature or quiddity in isolation by disregarding all of the other possible attendant

9 For an analysis of this aspect of Avicenna's reasoning, see Raja Bahlul, "Avicenna and the Problem of Universals."

10 Avicenna, *al-Shifā', al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, ed. Georges Qanawātī, Maḥmūd Al-Khuḍayrī, Aḥmad F. Al-Ahwānī (Cairo: Al-Maṭba'a al-amīriyya, 1952), I.12, p. 65ff.

qualities and concomitant properties that are extrinsic to the notion of quiddity itself, including existence (*wujūd*) and non-existence (*'adam*) which, according to Avicenna, are not part and parcel of the very quiddity of any contingent reality.[11] However, as Avicenna himself recognizes, the fact that these are contradictory opposites must not imply that a quiddity has neither property as *a matter of fact*, since denying or affirming both its existence and non-existence simultaneously would contravene the law of the excluded middle.[12] So even though from a logical perspective every quiddity is only ever itself and only itself, this does not preclude the fact from an ontological perspective that it is either existent or non-existent. What Avicenna says about quiddities in themselves is thus a crucial step in his formulation of the essence-existence distinction in contingent realities.[13]

Avicenna regards the logical meaning of "universal" to be separate in the same way that the meanings of "existence" and "non-existence" are separate, say, from the meaning of "horse" taken by itself. Like Aristotle, he asserts that a "universal" (*al-kullī*) at its most basic level is just whatever is capable of being predicated of many things. But unlike Aristotle, he recognizes that there are multiple types of universals that bear this definition, and hence even though there is only one definition of the term "universal," it can still be said in many ways. Avicenna's treatment of the problem is best appreciated by looking at propositional statements like "Animal is a universal." According to him, a proposition such as this consists

11 If the quiddity "animal" included within itself the idea of existence (*wujūd*), then no animal could be non-existent (*ma'dūm*). Similarly, if the quiddity "animal" included the idea of non-existence (*'adam*) within its essence, then no animal could ever be existent (*mawjūd*), since that whose essence is to be non-existent cannot be (or become) an existent, as this would imply a contradiction of a thing with itself.

12 See Avicenna, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt* [=*The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005)], 1:149ff. All translations are by Marmura, unless otherwise stated.

13 There is now a vast body of literature on Avicenna's essence-existence distinction. See Amos Bertolacci, "The Distinction of Essence and Existence in Avicenna's Metaphysics: The Text and its Context," in *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, ed. Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 257-88; Daniel De Haan, "A Mereological Construal of the Primary Notions *Being* and *Thing* in Avicenna and Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (2014): 335-60; Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Shay' or 'res' as a Concomitant of 'Being' in Avicenna," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, no. 12 (2001): 125-42; Olga Lizzini, "*Wuǧūd-mawǧūd*/existence-existent in Avicenna: A Key Ontological Notion in Arabic Philosophy," *Quaestio*, no. 3 (2003): 111-38; Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the *Metaphysics* of his *al-Shifā'*," in *Logos Islamikos: Studia Islamica in honorem Georgii Michaelis Wickens*, ed. Roger M. Savory and Dionisius A. Agius (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studes, 1984), 219-39; Fazlur Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, no. 4 (1958): 1-16; Robert Wisnovsky, "Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness (*šay'iyya*)," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, no. 10 (2000): 181-221.

of three conceptualizations: (1) the subject *qua* itself (viz. animal *qua* animal), (2) the predicate *qua* itself (viz. universal *qua* universal), and (3) the conceptualization of the proposition as a whole (viz. "Animal is a universal"). Somewhat confusingly, Avicenna equivocates the concept of universality by referring to each of the three aforementioned conceptualizations as a type of "universal." He refers to the concept "animal *qua* itself" as a "natural universal" (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*), which in itself is just itself—neither universal nor particular, neither existent nor non-existent, and so on. The reason for designating it a "natural universal" is apparently because it denotes the nature (*ṭabīʿa*), essence or quiddity (*māhiyya*) of a thing to which the accident of universality, properly speaking, is subsequently appended. Therefore, what is meant by the expression "natural universal" is something akin to the statement "the nature to which universality is predicated in the mind."

The predicate in the proposition "Animal is a universal" is what Avicenna calls the concept of universality in the strictest sense; that is, the idea that some first-order concept is "predicable of many." "Being predicable of many" is itself an idea of its own, however; one that is taken to be a secondary intelligible (*maʿqūl thānī*) given that it is a type of judgment one makes by relating primary intelligibles to their possible instantiations in the extramental world. Avicenna calls this a "logical universal" (*al-kullī al-manṭiqī*) because it is the proper notion of universality discussed among logicians alongside the notion of particularity (*al-juzʾiyya*).

Finally, the proposition "Animal is a universal" conjures a third conceptualization in our minds, namely, that of the concept of animal which is predicable of many things. By dint of the fact that this is a composite notion comprising two simpler conceptualizations, and given that one of these (i.e. "universal") is a second-order concept, the universalized animal is, to use Avicenna's terminology, a "mental universal" (*al-kullī al-ʿaqlī*).[14]

Now, according to Avicenna, neither logical nor mental universals have extramental reference; they are purely mind-dependent concepts incapable of existing extramentally. This is an essential non-existence, as opposed to a merely contingent non-existence. Furthermore, notice that Avicenna isolates the subject's concept from that of the predicate: "animal" *qua* itself is just itself. Hence the reason why, he states, predicating "animal" with "universality" enriches the subject, the

14 See Michael E. Marmura, "Quiddity and Universality in Avicenna"; idem., "Avicenna's Chapter on Universals in the *Isagoge* of the *Shifāʾ*."

concept of which did not originally contain the idea of it being a universal. This is unlike the statement "Human is rational," because the predicate in this case already expresses an idea that is part of the subject and to some extent, though not exactly, merely tautological, which is one of the reasons why definitions cannot be demonstrated.[15] To say that "animal" is a universal (*al-ḥayawān kullī*) is therefore not only meaningful, but also indicative that the concept of universality stands apart from the concept of animal *qua* itself. "Animal" and "universal" are therefore regarded as two independent meanings, which may or may not be truthfully predicated of each other.

Having isolated the concept of quiddity *qua* itself, Avicenna moves beyond the pure notion of quiddity abstracted from all other attached meanings to consider two further analytical ways in which a quiddity like "animal" may be conceptualized, thus enumerating three separate ways of "considering" a quiddity which, in the Arabic tradition, are collectively known as "the analytical considerations of quiddity" (*iʿtibārāt al-māhiyya*). He formulates these analytical distinctions by asking whether, and in what ways, a quiddity is *conditioned*. Depending on the nature of this conditioning (or its lack thereof), he then enumerates three distinct formulations: (1) quiddity as unconditioned (*al-māhiyya lā bi-sharṭ*), (2) quiddity as positively conditioned (*al-māhiyya bi-sharṭ shayʾ*), and (3) quiddity as negatively conditioned (*al-māhiyya bi-sharṭ lā shayʾ*).[16]

The first sense of quiddity is the non-conditioned quiddity (*al-māhiyya lā bi-sharṭ*) that, at face value, appears to be identical to Avicenna's notion of quiddity

15 See Riccardo Strobino, "Avicenna on the Indemonstrability of Definition," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, no. 21 (2010): 113-63.

16 There are protracted discussions, especially among Safavid and post-Safavid Shīʿī thinkers, philosophers as well as legists (*uṣūlīs*), as to what exactly sits at the top of this division (the *maqsam*), which is to say: What is it that is being divided into the non-conditioned, positively conditioned and negatively conditioned forms of quiddity? The philosophical impetus that spurs on these debates is the well-founded belief that a more generic notion cannot itself be one of its own divisions (*taqsīm al-shayʾ ilā nafsihi muḥāl*). That being so, a debate ensues as to whether, and if so what, distinction lies between the *maqsam* and the non-conditioned form of quiddity (*al-māhiyya lā bi-sharṭ*). The standard response that has gained popularity among some contemporary Iranian thinkers is that the place of division is *al-māhiyya lā bi-sharṭ maqsamī*, while its division into the non-conditioned form of quiddity is *al-māhiyya lā bi-sharṭ qismī*, which then leads to the vexing question as to which of these (the *maqsam* or its *qism*) is the natural universal. Various scholars have advocated both of these alternatives, and others deny either one of them being identifiable with the natural universal. But in my opinion, the latter option seems to be the most appropriate, namely, that the natural universal is neither the *maqsam* nor any one of its divisions (*aqsām*), for in either case a quiddity considered as a *maqsam* or a *qism* is not a consideration of quiddity *qua* itself. See Toshihiko Izutsu, "The Problem of Quiddity and Natural Universal in Islamic Metaphysics."

qua itself (*al-māhiyya min ḥaythu hiya*). Whenever we consider a quiddity like animal *qua* itself, what we actually become conscious of in our minds is a quiddity that is not conditioned by the existence or non-existence of any additional concept beyond what it is in itself. So, for example, animal *qua* itself is *not conditioned* by either universality or particularity, but is merely just itself. Hence, we seem to be back at Avicenna's pure notion of quiddity *qua* itself.

In contrast, the second sense of quiddity is that in which the quiddity we consider is an enriched concept and no longer just itself, but rather one that has been positively conditioned by another concept (*al-māhiyya bi-sharṭ shay'*) extrinsic to itself, thereby causing the expansion of the original concept of animal. The concept of "the universal animal" or "the vertebrate animal" is not the concept of animal *qua* itself, and hence no longer simply quiddity in its non-conditioned state. Rather it is joined to and therefore "conditioned by" some other concept beyond itself, namely, the concept of universality or being-vertebrate.[17]

Finally, a third sense of quiddity is one in which a quiddity like animal is conditioned by a negation, as in the concept, say, of "an animal that is not rational." Here, the concept of animal is deliberately adjusted so as to separate it from another quiddity, and their combined conceptualization is what in Avicenna's nomenclature gives rise to a negatively conditioned quiddity (*al-māhiyya bi-sharṭ lā*) which, regardless of the fact that it involves a negation, still causes an expansion in the concept of the original quiddity. Crucially for our purposes, Avicenna identifies the non-conditioned sense of quiddity with the natural universal (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*), and this as we shall see will have important ramifications for his own solution to the so-called problem of universals.

For Avicenna, all extramental entities are positively conditioned quiddities and therefore particular realities. John, for example, is a particular by virtue of the quiddity "human" being conditioned by a host of qualities and properties, each of them combining to produce a single instantiation of the human that is John. In this respect there is no doubt, Avicenna remarks, that not only do positively conditioned quiddities exist, but, as such, they are particulars, and therefore impossible to predicate of anything else apart from themselves. But the real question, which then becomes Avicenna's modified version of Porphyry's so-called problem of

17 Cf. Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī Dāneshpazhūh (Tehran: Inteshārāt-e Dāneshghāh-e Tehrān, 1985), 536-37; idem., *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt* V.1, 152ff.

universals, is whether or not the natural universal or the non-conditioned sense of quiddity also exists *in re*. In other words, the crux of the problem is whether or not the predicate in the proposition "John is an animal" refers to something in the extramental world. In many respects, the entire issue revolves around the mereological connection, if any, that natures have with their particulars. While he is absolutely adamant that a universal *qua* universal exists only in the mind *post rem*, Avicenna does insist strongly upon the extramental existence of natural universals *in re*.

Avicenna's argument is presented in its most detailed form in Book 5, Chapter 1 of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'*. He begins by noting that what is first observed by the external senses are particular things such as "this human" and "this animal." These, he says, are "natural things," and by this he is referring to external things that belong to a certain natural kind. But apart from being particular entities, Avicenna then goes on to remark that each of these natural things is an aggregate in which "human" *per se* and "animal" *per se* are joined to other things. In other words, although our senses perceive Zayd as a particular human, Zayd himself is just "human" *in the form of Zayd*, meaning that he is joined with his matter and its associated accidents. As Avicenna writes,

> There is here something perceived by the senses—namely, animal or man, together with matter and accidents. This is natural man. There is [also] here something that is animal or human—viewed in itself in terms of itself, without taking with it what it has mingled with and without its having the condition that it is either general or specific, one or many, whether in actuality or also through the consideration of potency, inasmuch as it is in potency. For animal inasmuch as it is animal, and man inasmuch as it is man—that is, with respect to its definition and meaning, without any attention being paid to other matters conjoining it—is nothing but animal or man.[18]

On its own, this passage could be interpreted in one of two ways. In epistemological terms, one could argue that all Avicenna wishes to say is that upon being apprehended, an individual human (or animal) can be conceptualized *in the mind* in such a way that all of the elements that particularize "this human" are removed from its consideration. Therefore, what is left afterward is just the abstracted notion of humanity (or animality), which is neither particular nor universal in itself. On the other hand, it could be argued that Avicenna is making a stronger, ontological claim: that "this human" is a combination *in re* of "human" and

18 Avicenna, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt* V.1, p. 152-53.

other things, and hence there is in things themselves something we call "human" that, although joined to other things, is just itself when considered in isolation. Whichever of these interpretations is correct, what is nevertheless certain in both of them is that in Avicenna's view it is possible to "reflect" (*i'tibār*) on the concept of humanity just by itself without association to any other thing: "Considering animal in itself would be permissible even though it exists with another, because [it] itself with another is [still] itself. Its essence, then, belongs to itself, and its being with another is either an accidental matter [that] occurs to it or some necessary concomitant to its nature [...]."[19]

It soon becomes clear, however, that this consideration of animal has, in Avicenna's view, an ontological counterpart in things themselves, and hence animal *qua* itself exists outside the mind. His remarks therefore show that he is not merely concerned with an epistemological possibility, but rather with an ontological statement of fact. The first clue is given by his assertion that the non-conditioned form of animal is a *part* of the conditioned animal: "Considered in this way, it [animal] is prior in existence to the animal that is particular due to its accidents or [the animal] that is a universal, [the] extramental or mental [respectively], in the way the simple is prior to the complex and the part to the whole."[20]

Avicenna's proof of the extramental existence of natures therefore rests on the mereological claim that the natural universal is a part of its particular, without which the particular could not have existed because wholes cannot exist without their parts.

He concludes in an almost syllogistic manner by remarking:

> The fact that the animal existing in the individual is a certain animal does not prevent animal inasmuch as it is animal—[that is], not through a consideration of its being an animal in some state—from existing in it. [This is] because if this individual is a certain animal, then a certain animal exists. Hence animal [inasmuch as it is animal], which is a part of a certain animal, exists.[21]

So far, Avicenna has answered the first and third of Porphyry's questions: Although genera and species are universals that are predicable of many and therefore

19 Ibid., V.1, p. 153 (Marmura modified). As we shall see, Avicenna's characterization of animal *qua* itself as a part of this animal will turn out to be a problematic claim for Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

20 Ibid., V.1, p. 153.

21 Ibid.; cf. ibid., V.2, p. 161: "If we then say that the universal exists in external things, we do not mean inasmuch as it is universal in this mode of universality; rather, we mean that the *nature* to which universality occurs exists in things external [to the mind]" (emphasis added).

purely mental, the natural universal (i.e. quiddity *qua* itself) does exist extramentally. Hence, a certain type of universal does exist outside the mind. As *a part of* things, it is *in* things. Avicenna shifts his focus in what remains of Book V, Chapter 1 (and parts of Chapter 2) to criticizing the Platonists who hold that universals exist separately from particulars, and thus to an aspect of Porphyry's third question, namely, whether universals exist in sensibles or separately from them. But having argued that natural universals exist as parts of natural particulars, he has already answered that question and therefore devotes himself to a more or less dialectical discussion in which he pinpoints the reasons why the Platonists are mistaken.[22]

Avicenna ends his discussion at *Ilāhiyyāt* V.1 by summarizing the different ways in which the natural universal (or non-conditioned quiddity) can be said to exist depending on the temporal connection essences have with matter. As noted, a particular animal is a combination of the nature "animal" joined to a multitude of particularizing accidents, all of which derive from its connection to individual matter and as a result of which the natural universal is said to exist "in multiplicity" (*fī kathra*). The particular animal, then, is what Avicenna calls "the natural thing" (*al-shay' al-ṭabīʿī*), whereas the nature "animal" taken in itself is the natural universal (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*). It is the natural universal whose existence, he says, "is prior to natural existence in the manner of the priority of the simple to the composite."[23]

Aside from its natural existence, animal *qua* itself has two other modes of existence, one that precedes the existence of the natural thing ("before multiplicity") and another that proceeds it ("after multiplicity"). The former is termed "divine existence" (*al-wujūd al-ilāhī*) given that the cause of its existence,

22 I have alluded to some of his remarks in this regard above and therefore will not comment any further on this part of Avicenna's discussion. See also Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Argument Against the Platonists." What is interesting to note here is that Avicenna does not appear to answer Porphyry's second question in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'*. The question as to whether natural universals are sense perceivable or not is not immediately obvious, since it could be argued that some wholes are only perceived when their parts are perceived. However, it is precisely this question that Avicenna appears to be addressing in the opening sections of the *Ishārāt*'s metaphysical part. Given that a nature like "humanity" is predicable of multiple individuals, Avicenna argues that it cannot, because of this fact, be sense perceivable, for what is perceivable by the senses must of necessity have matter and, as a consequence, the accidents of matter, such as place, position, dimensions of a particular magnitude, and so on. But had this been so, then "human" too would have been a particular, and thus could not have been predicable of many. Hence "human" is not sense perceivable. See Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt*, IV.1, p. 104 (=trans. Shams Inati, *Ibn Sina's Remarks and Admonitions: Physics & Metaphysics. An Analysis and Annotated Translation* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2014], 119-20).

23 Avicenna, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, V.1, p. 156.

according to Avicenna, is divine providence (*al-ʿināya al-ilāhiyya*).[24] In this mode of existence—a mode that Avicenna also refers to as the mode in which a natural universal is said to exist "before multiplicity" (*qabl al-kathra*)—"animal" is clearly disengaged from matter and therefore exists in a state of total abstraction. The final mode of existence is that in which the natural universal has been extracted from natural particulars into mental existence and due to which conceptual apperception (*taṣawwur*), occurs. Since this occurs by abstracting the forms of things from their particulars, Avicenna refers to it as the mode in which the natural universal exists "after multiplicity."[25]

So much, then, for Avicenna's doctrine of universals. Over the course of the next three centuries and beyond, a variety of responses and objections to different aspects of his philosophy would be raised by thinkers from diverse backgrounds and intellectual persuasions. Sufi mystics, Shariʿa-based theologians, and even other philosophers with different metaphysical outlooks such as Averroes, commented on and responded to Avicenna's philosophy. Few, if any, accepted what he had to say uncritically.

The most important and influential critique of Avicenna's doctrine of natural universals, however, was not penned until the mid-to-late fourteenth century, more than three centuries after his death, by the Persian logician Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 766/1365). This is not to suggest that Avicenna's doctrine of natures was not subjected to criticism before Quṭb al-Dīn, for it most certainly was. However, in almost every instance his critics, among them personalities such as al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), dismissed the Avicennan concept of nature through more generic concerns and criticisms about his views on secondary causality or hylomorphism. Even the existence of the Active Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*) which confers the natures of things upon their designated matters became one of the indirect means of disbarring Avicenna's concept of nature given its problematic status for the *mutakallimūn*. What makes Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī's

24 Ibid.; cf. C. Belo, *Chance and Determinism in Avicenna and Averroes* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 108-13; S. Nusseibeh, "Avicenna: Providence and God's Knowledge of Particulars," in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 275-88; M. U. Faruque, "Mullā Ṣadrā on the Problem of Natural Universals," 284-85.

25 For interesting parallels in Yaḥyā ibn ʿAdī and Avicenna's criticisms, see Marwan Rashed, "Ibn ʿAdi et Avicenna: sur les types d'existants," in *Aristotele e i suoi esegeti neplatonci: Logica e ontologia nelle interpretazione greche e arabe. Atti del Convegno internazionale, Roma, 19-20 ottobre 2001*, eds. Vincenza Celluprica and Cristina D'Ancona (Naples: Biblipolis, 2004), 106-71.

criticisms especially noteworthy, therefore, is the recognition that the works in which he criticizes Avicenna target the doctrine of natural universals specifically, and thus offer direct criticisms of a crucial aspect of Avicenna's ontology and natural philosophy that are not connected, at least for the purpose at hand, with other surrounding topics in Avicenna's thought.

Al-Rāzī's criticisms are to be found in two main works. He first introduces and discusses the Avicennan doctrine of natural universals in his commentary on Sirāj al-Dīn al-Urmawī's (d. 683/1283) *Maṭāliʿ al-anwār* (entitled *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār fī sharḥ Maṭāliʿ al-anwār*), undoubtedly his most influential and original contribution to the science of logic. After presenting Avicenna's account and the arguments for its existence *in re*, Quṭb al-Dīn proceeds to express serious doubts about the Avicennan part-theory of universals. In addition, he twice refers his readers to his shorter treatise *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt* where, he says, the matter is ascertained (*taḥqīq*) more accurately.[26] For at least a century if not longer, Quṭb al-Dīn's criticisms and rejection of this specific theory affected Muslim theologians' attitudes toward the existence of natures, essences, and quiddities *in re*.

In order to appreciate his reticence toward Avicenna's views and his own perspective on the problem of universals, it behooves us to examine al-Rāzī's writings in detail. Since al-Rāzī formulates his opinions and subsequent criticisms of the prevailing Avicennan logical tradition first in his commentary on al-Urmawī's *Maṭāliʿ al-anwār*, I shall take this as the starting-point of our discussion. In addition, I shall make occasional cross-references to his *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt* not only for the purpose of comparison, but also in order to highlight any additional comments or arguments set out in this work that supplement the discussion in his *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār fī sharḥ Maṭāliʿ al-anwār*. As we shall see, despite the occasional difference the two works are more or less consistent in terms of their overall purpose, especially in their denial of the Avicennan contention that natural universals exist in extramental particulars.

26 This hitherto little-known work has passed silently in modern scholarship. But in its own day it exerted a great influence on various influential post-Avicennan *kalām* thinkers. It was also subject to a number of critical commentaries, most notably by the two Ottoman scholars Mullā Ḥanafī al-Tabrīzī (d. 1495) and Amīr Ḥasan al-Rūmī (d. 1534). The treatise, along with the commentaries of these two Ottoman scholars, was edited and published in Ömer Türker, *Risâle fî Tahkîki'l-Küliyyât: Tümeller Risâle ve Şerhleri* (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanliği, 2013); henceforth *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt*.

II. Quṭb Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī On The Definition of "Universal"

Like most systematic works of logic composed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, al-Urmawī begins his discussion by providing a clear definition: "If the conceptualization of a meaning is itself what prevents sharing [among many] then it is a particular (*al-juz'ī*), otherwise it is a universal (*al-kullī*)—regardless of whether the imagined instantiations existing extramentally are impossible, or possible but do not exist, or possible but only one [instantiation] exists along with the possibility or impossibility of other [instantiations] existing, and regardless of whether its many instantiations are finite or infinite."[27] Despite several technical caveats, this has been a fairly standard definition for universals and particulars since Avicenna's time.[28] It emphasizes the epistemic as opposed to the ontological factors that characterize the definitions of universals and particulars, the former being just that notion (*mafhūm*) the very conceptualization of which in the mind does not prevent it from being shared. Whether it is *actually* shared through multiple instantiations or external referents (sing. *miṣdāq*) is quite irrelevant, since even a meaning that is capable of being shared but nonetheless impossible of extramental existence (e.g. a partner for God [*sharīk al-bārī*]) is, through our conceptualization of it alone, still a universal meaning (*mafhūm kullī*). By the same token, however, the *mafhūm* "necessary of existence in itself" is also a universal in spite of having only one real instantiation. This is not because the very conceptualization of this *mafhūm* prevents it from having multiple referents, but rather because of external factors in the form of extraneous arguments that restrict the number of instantiations to just a single referent outside the mind.[29]

In his commentary, al-Rāzī provides some interesting remarks (in the form of objections and responses) that help clarify the meaning and definition of universals further. The first and arguably most significant is his clarification of the term *ishtirāk* (lit. "sharing"), a word that Arabic translators of Greek philosophical texts used to translate *methexis*. As a philosophical term, it may be considered from both epistemic and ontological perspectives. Indeed, although the concern in this section of al-Rāzī's commentary is confined to the definition of universals and hence their epistemic characteristics only, he himself will discuss the ontological (mis)interpretation of *ishtirāk* at later points in his *Sharḥ*.

27 Cited in Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār fī sharḥ Maṭāliʿ al-anwār*, ed. Abū al-Qāsim al-Raḥmānī (Tehran: Muʾassasah Pazhūhashī Ḥikmat u Falsafah-e Īrān, 1393 SH), 1:151.

28 Cf. Avicenna, *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Manṭiq*, *al-Madkhal* I.8, 41ff; idem., *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt* V.1, p. 149.

29 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār*, 1:152.

As emphasized by al-Urmawī, a key concept in the definition of a universal term is its "being shared by many" (*mushtarak bayna kathīrīn*). The unnamed critic in al-Rāzī's first objection criticizes this interpretation by first explaining that "being shared by many" means just that a certain meaning (e.g. human) is a universal if, and only if, it is capable of being *related* to many, be it actually or by way of supposition, through a relation of "correspondence" (*muṭābaqa*). In other words, if a certain meaning is capable of being conceived as having a correspondence-relation to many things, then it is a universal; otherwise, it is a particular.[30] But if having a relation of correspondence to many is all that is required for a certain idea to qualify as a universal meaning, then this raises a problem. Hence the objection that "If a group of people conceptualize Zayd, his extramental form would have a correspondence-relation to the mental forms in the minds of each individual in that group, for which reason it would therefore be necessary to regard Zayd as a universal."[31]

What this example tries to show, therefore, is that if Zayd is thought of by five people, say, then the external Zayd *corresponds* to five images (or mental forms) of Zayd in the minds of those five individuals. In other words, Zayd himself has a relation to many things, albeit that the "things" in question here are the mental representations of him in the minds of five individuals. Therefore, had the notion "being shared by many" meant simply having the correspondence-relation to many, then the external Zayd ought to qualify as a universal on just this basis alone. In his response, Quṭb al-Dīn correctly explains that "being shared is not simply the correspondence-relation without any further qualification, but rather the correspondence *of what occurs in the mind* to many things."[32] Thus interpreted, the universal has a unidirectional form of correspondence; the mental form is related to many things, not a thing to many mental forms.[33]

Al-Rāzī's response to this objection can itself, in part, be used to dismiss the view that the key term *ishtirāk* in these contexts denotes an ontological sharing among things themselves (*fī al-aʿyān*). There are two ways in which this can be imagined: either in the Platonic sense that corruptible individuals partake in being the type of things they are by participating in (*mushtarak fīhi*) a single incorruptible

30 Ibid., 1:153; cf. idem, *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt*, 21.

31 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār*, 1:153.

32 Ibid.

33 Al-Rāzī adds weight to this interpretation by mentioning a remark of Avicenna's that supports his qualified understanding of the correspondence-relation. Cf. Avicenna, *al-Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal* I.V, 37, lines 9-10.

Form separated from the particulars mimicking them, or in the sense whereby a numerically single nature or quiddity is shared among multiple particulars. Avicenna rejects both of these interpretations, and one assumes that al-Rāzī does too despite him only proffering arguments against the second interpretation in the writings with which we are concerned.

Accordingly, in *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt* he writes:

> A certain group reckons that the meaning of a quiddity being "shared" among many is that it [the quiddity] is itself existent in them. But this reckoning of theirs is false; firstly, because it entails the existence of a single thing in a multiple number of locations and, secondly, because it would lead to the absurdity that a single thing is characterized with properties that are contraries of each other [e.g. black and white, hot and cold].[34]

Al-Rāzī's argumentation here is no different than Avicenna's. One of the reasons why a single instance of quiddity cannot itself be shared among multiple individuals is because nothing can be in more than one place at the same time, not least because if this were possible a single quiddity would thereby have to be attended with properties that conflict with one another. If, in other words, humanity were just one nature occurring simultaneously in Zayd and 'Amr, and supposing that Zayd were a logician and 'Amr not, then the result of them having the numerically same nature would be that a single nature is attributed with the properties "being a logician" and "not being a logician" at the same time. This is clearly impossible.[35]

What is definitely not meant by the term "universal," then, is that a certain meaning designates *in re* the quiddity or nature of things that, being numerically one, is shared among multiple individuals in the extramental world. Zayd and 'Amr may be said to "share" the nature of humanity in common, but this cannot mean that they are the same human being. Their natures are assuredly the same, but not in the sense of being numerically identical. Rather, they each possess their own unique instantiation of the form of humanity, each possessing its own particular accidents which, in combination with each other, make up the individual that is either Zayd or 'Amr.

The second objection in al-Rāzī's commentary targets the validity of the opening clause of al-Urmawī's definition of the universal by focusing on the term

34 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt*, 21.

35 Cf. Bahmanyār, *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl*, ed. Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (Tehran: Inteshārāt-e Daneshghāh-e Tehrān, 2014), 502.

"conceptualization" (*taṣawwur*). The critic, following Peripatetic precedent, defines the act of conceptualization as "the occurrence of the form of a thing in the mind," but given that all mental forms are, in his view, universals anyway, including the term *taṣawwur* in the definition of the particular is invalid, since *taṣawwur* is always of something universal. In other words, whatever *mafhūm* occurs in the mind is prevented from being characterized as a particular from the very outset by dint of it being a mental form, which the critic argues is always universal. The implication here is that there are no particular *mafhūm*s, only universal ones.[36]

Al-Rāzī rejects this claim by clarifying that it is a mistake to think that all mental forms are universals. Rather, depending on the means by which these forms are acquired, a given concept can be either universal or particular: universal if it is acquired without the intermediation of a sense organ (*āla*) and particular if it is.[37] The bifurcation of concepts into universals and particulars is thus a direct result of a parallel bifurcation in the psychological processes that cause these concepts to appear in the mind. All sensory forms originate in the sense organs and, as a result, retain some degree of connection with the material adjuncts of matter (*lawāḥiq al-mādda*). The soul perceives these forms through the power of the imagination which, though separated from individual matters, nonetheless preserves the material aspects of the sensed form such as places, positions, and magnitudes. The act of intellection (*ta'aqqul*), on the other hand, perceives the intelligible form in complete abstraction without the intermediation of the senses. It is immaterial in the fullest sense of the word, lacking not only any connection to designated matter but also the adjuncts of matter. Regardless of how these forms are acquired, it is always the soul that perceives the forms in each case, not the senses.[38]

The final objection mentioned by Quṭb al-Dīn's unnamed critic is that the word "itself" (*nafs*) in the definitions provided by al-Urmawī is, in fact, superfluous. The expression: "The universal is that whose conceptualization does not prevent its meaning [from] being shared" is, according to our critic, just as adequate as the definition: "The universal is that whose conceptualization *itself* does not prevent its meaning [from] being shared." Hence the word "itself" (*nafs*) can be dispensed with in the definitions of the particular and the universal.

36 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi' al-asrār*, 1:154.

37 Ibid., 1:154.

38 Ibid., 1:154. In Avicenna's philosophy, the intelligible forms are conferred upon the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*) by the Active Intellect.

Although there may seem to be little difference between these statements other than a small semantic one, al-Rāzī explains that the reason why this extra word is necessary is because it helps deflect a potential ontological mistake. Since the notions of particularity and universality are accidents of the mental forms of things in the mind and not of things themselves, then it might be wrongly supposed that because mental forms correspond to their counterpart realities in the external world that those realities *themselves* are either particular or universal. For example, the *mafhūm* of a necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*) is a universal, but this does not mean that the external instantiation of it is also a universal. In fact, the opposite would have to be true because anything that exists in the world extramentally is always something particular, even if its mental form is a universal. For this reason, and in order to stipulate in the definition that it is always the mental form of a thing that is judged as being capable of being shared or not, al-Rāzī says it is necessary to place emphasis on the *mafhūm* itself being the criterion by which meanings are stipulated as either particulars or universals.[39]

What is important to note here is that this also implies that a meaning is a universal regardless of whether or not its particular instances exist. As al-Rāzī explains, this is the reason why al-Urmawī attached all of the caveats to the definition of the universal that he did, for a universal may either be impossible of existence extramentally (*mumtani'*)[40] or contingent (*mumkin*), in which case its external instances either do or do not exist.[41] If they exist, then the number of instances are either one or many. If one, then this is either because other instances of the universal are impossible[42] or possible.[43] If many, then they are either finite[44] or infinite.[45] Therefore, the extramental existence of individual referents is not to be factored in when deciding whether meanings themselves are universals or not. As al-Rāzī states, "the criterion for universality is the conceivability of it being shared by many according to the intellect and the possibility it being predicated of them by mere dint of its meaning (*mafhūm*)."[46] This clearly is exactly what Avicenna himself urged in own writings.

39 Ibid., 1:154-55.

40 As in the case of God's partner (*sharīk al-bārī*).

41 As in the case of a gryphon (*al-'anqā'*).

42 As in the case of the Necessary Existent, for example.

43 As in the case of other suns, for example.

44 As in the case of the seven planets, for example.

45 As in the case of the number of rational souls, for example.

46 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi' al-asrār*, 1:155; cf. idem., *Taḥrīr al-qawā'id al-manṭiqiyya fī sharḥ al-Risālat al-Shamsiyya*, ed. Muḥsin Bīdārfar (Qom: Manshūrāt-e Bīdār, 1428 AH), 124-29.

III. Quṭb Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī On The Existence of The Natural Universal

The previous section looked at the definition of the universal as any *mafhūm* that is capable of "being shared by many," where the notion of "being shared" means just that an idea in the mind is capable of being related to multiple instantiations even if this is done by way of merely postulating through supposition multiple referents to which the *mafhūm* can be related. This section now begins an important discussion on al-Rāzī's opinions on Avicenna's tripartite division of universals into (*a*) the natural universal (*al-kullī al-ṭabīʿī*), (*b*) the logical universal (*al-kullī al-manṭiqī*), and (*c*) the mental universal (*al-kullī al-ʿaqlī*) and the question as to which of these, if any, exist mind-independently in the external world.

To begin, let us consider a propositional statement such as "Animal is a universal." Al-Urmawī observes that the *mafhūm* "animal" (*ḥayawān*) cannot be the same as the *mafhūm* "universal" (*kullī*) and provides two justifications to support this claim. First, if "animal" and "universal" were synonymous (i.e. the same in meaning but different in their semantic forms), then the subject of the proposition being related (*al-muntasab*), namely "animal," would be the same as the relation (*al-nisba*) itself, namely "universal." This is of course impossible because a relation cannot be identical to one of its correlates.[47] Second, the *mafhūm* "animal" is a part of the conceptualization of the *mafhūm* "universal animal," and hence if both "animal" and "universal" were the same intensionally speaking then neither would a part of the whole but rather just the same as the whole itself. Again this is clearly false, and therefore both the subject and its predicate in the proposition "Animal is a universal" have, according to al-Urmawī, different *mafhūm*s.[48]

Al-Urmawī then goes on to state that the subject to which "universal" is related (i.e. the *muntasab*) is the natural universal, while the relation (i.e. the *nisba*) of universality itself is the logical universal. What is then conceptualized as a combination of both is the mental universal. After making these classifications, he goes on to remark:

47 Cf. Afḍal al-Dīn al-Khūnajī, *Kashf al-asrār ʿan ghawāmiḍ al-afkār*, ed. Khaled El-Rouayheb (Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Freie Universität Berlin, 2010), 35.

48 Sirāj al-Dīn al-Urmawī quoted in Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār*, 1:179.

> The existence of the natural [universal] is certain, for "animal" is a part of this existent animal, and whatever is a part of something existent is [itself] something existent. Whatever is its part is therefore either (*a*) animal *qua* itself or (*b*) something with a qualification, in which case the initial scenario comes around again. Therefore, animal without any condition exists [extramentally], and its conceptualization [by itself] permits it being shared. Hence, the natural universal exists [*in re*].[49]

What Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī has to say in his comments on this passage from al-Urmawī's *Maṭāliʿ al-anwār* and elsewhere in his *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt* will have significant repercussions on the development of the Avicennan notion of quiddity after him and the question of whether or not natural universals exist *in re*. He begins in the customary manner of explaining what the original author intends by first explaining that the *mafhūm* "animal" *qua* itself is neither particular nor universal. Like Avicenna, he argues that had this not been so, then either all animals would have been universals and no individual animals could have existed, or else only a single animal would have existed. But since both options are clearly absurd, it necessarily follows that animal *qua* itself is neither a universal nor a particular.[50]

Al-Rāzī then makes an important intervention to clarify once more the correct sense of what it means to call something a "universal": "It is not the case that 'animal' is predicated as a universal in the external world, such that there would then be a [numerically] single essence existing in many things."[51] What really happens, Quṭb al-Dīn clarifies, is that a single relation occurs to the intelligible form of animality in the mind through which the intellect of a person then relates it (i.e. the *mafhūm* "animality") to multiple individuals in the external world. The accident that therefore occurs to the mental form is the notion of universality *per se*. The relation between "animality" and "universality" is like the relation (*nisba*) of a piece of cloth to the color white. Just as this color is an external accident of an external piece of cloth, likewise the accident "universal" is a mental accident of the intelligible form of animality.[52] A distinction between animality and universality is then justified using al-Urmawī's argument: The *nisba* and its *muntasab* can never be the same.

49 Cited in ibid., 1:179-80. Al-Urmawī's argument is identical to the one made by Avicenna at *Ilāhiyyāt* V.I. The original Avicennan argument is mentioned with approval by a number of thirteenth-century thinkers, such as Afḍal al-Dīn al-Khūnajī (d. 646/1248), *Kashf al-asrār fī ghawāmiḍ al-afkār*, 35-36; Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī, in Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Taḥrīr al-qawāʿid al-manṭiqiyya fī sharḥ al-Risālat al-Shamsiyya*, 167ff; and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, in al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī's *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-iʿtiqād*, ed. Ḥasanzādah al-Āmulī (Qom: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1437 AH), 127ff.

50 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār*, 1:180-81.

51 Ibid., 1:180.

52 Ibid., 1:181; cf. idem., *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt*, 21-22.

Hence, not only must the two be conceptually different, they must also be different to the whole that results from their combination. Accordingly, here it is the *muntasab* (i.e. the subject being related) that is called the natural universal ("animality"), and the *nisba* (i.e. the relation) that is called the logical universal ("universality"), and the whole that results from their combination, which is called mental universal ("universal animal").[53]

However, according to al-Rāzī, this is what the *muta'akhkhirūn* scholars believed. But the fact that their opinions can be objected to marks the commencement of his important critique on the tradition that had developed around this topic since Avicenna's time. In the first instance, if animal *qua* itself were a natural universal or a natural genus, then its characterization as such would have to have been due to the fact that it is an animal only. Yet this, argues al-Rāzī, is problematic because it would imply that every individual animal is a universal or a natural genus and that every species is a natural genus, neither of which is possible. Individuals *qua* individuals cannot be universals or genera, nor can a true logical species (*al-naw' al-ḥaqīqī*) be characterized as a genus.[54]

More significantly, al-Rāzī points out that if a natural universal were just merely some nature, then given that all genera, species, specific differences, and accidents are natures of one kind or another, there would no longer be any difference between the five so-called Porphyrean universals, each one being identical to the others inasmuch as each is a nature and therefore, according to this reasoning, a natural universal.[55] Hence, for both of these reasons one cannot take any nature unqualifiedly and assume that just because it is a nature that it is a natural universal. Instead, one must also take into consideration the added notion that it is a nature that has been formulated for predication in the mind, either as a genus, species, specific difference, and so on. In other words, animal *qua* itself cannot be a natural universal; only that animal that has been formulated as a subject and for which it is appropriate that it be predicated of many things should be regarded as the natural universal, even though it has not yet been predicated as a universal. As Quṭb al-Dīn states: "The natural universal is animal not in respect of its nature, but rather in the respect that if it occurs in the mind, [then] it is appropriate for it to be predicated of many things."[56]

53 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi' al-asrār*, 1:180.

54 Ibid., 1:182.

55 Ibid.; cf. al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī's marginal gloss (*ḥāshiya*) in Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Taḥrīr al-qawā'id al-manṭiqiyya fī sharḥ al-Risālat al-Shamsiyya*, 169, ftn. 1.

56 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi' al-asrār*, 182. As noted by Toshihiko Izutsu ("The Problem of Quiddity and Natural Universal in Islamic Metaphysics," 133), "the concept of 'natural universal' thus understood directly goes back to the Avicennian concept of 'nature' (*ṭabī'a*), with this difference, however, – at least

Two important consequences arise out of this objection: one logical and the other ontological. From a logical perspective, the natural universal cannot be identified as a quiddity *simpliciter* (i.e. *al-māhiyya min ḥaythu hiya*). A quiddity *qua* itself is not a natural universal because it has not been made open to the possibility yet of being predicated of many. Animal *qua* itself is only animal, and hence not a natural universal. The ontological consequence here would be that a natural universal, according to the way that Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī defines it, is a purely mental object. When one considers a nature as a subject ready for predication, then one necessarily considers it in the mind, for the notion of predictability is a purely logical one.[57]

However, it could be argued that this newly formulated notion of the natural universal makes it almost the same as, if not identical to, the mental universal, given that the condition of "being predicable of many" is attached to the nature of a thing that, when conceptualized together, make the mental universal. When dealing with this objection, al-Rāzī's strategy is to equivocate the concept of the *ʿāriḍ* (i.e. the predicate "universality") that occurs to a subject that is a nature, which he says can either be taken to mean that universality "occurs *in* something" or "occurs *to* something." That is, whenever "universality" is predicated of a subject, it can either be said to occur "to" a nature or to be "in" the mental conceptualization of a universalized nature. In the first sense, the occurrence of universality "to" a nature conditions that nature in the form of a natural universal, whereas in the second the notion of universality is itself a part of the conceptualization of the universalized nature and thus a mental universal. To predicate universality of animality is therefore not the same as conceptualizing a universal animal. The first involves universality occurring "to" a subject that is not yet universalized, but will soon become so when combined with its predicate in the intellect, whereas the second requires universality to be conceived of as a part of "the universal animal." In other words, al-Rāzī argues that a natural universal is not a natural species in the external world, but rather a nature that, when it occurs in the mind, is appropriated for predication upon many things. The crucial difference is that the natural universal has to be made into a potential subject for the reception of the logical accident "said of many things," and that nature *qua* nature as a pure intention (*maʿnā*) is not even a logical subject, let alone predicable of many.[58]

according to some of the leading thinkers – that by the Avicennian *ṭabīʿa* is meant a pure 'quiddity' (*māhiyya*), like 'man' or 'animal', taken in itself and by itself without any external determination, while 'natural universal' refers to the same 'quiddity' ('man' or 'animal') in so far as it is considered being ready to receive the qualification of being-'universal'."

57 Cf. Avicenna, *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Manṭiq*, *al-Madkhal*, I.12, p. 66.

58 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār*, 1:183.

According to Quṭb al-Dīn, therefore, an expression like "Animal is a universal" (*al-ḥayawān kullī*) has four conceptualizations, and not just the three that were averred by his predecessors.[59] In addition to the concepts of (*a*) animal *qua* itself, (*b*) universal *qua* itself and (*c*) their combination, al-Rāzī argues that it is necessary that the latter of these be preceded by the concept of the subject (i.e. "animal") as a subject formulated for the predicate "universal."[60] It is the last of these and not the first that is the natural universal, and as a consequence "animal *qua* itself is not one of the [five] universals."[61]

What is crucially important to note is that according to al-Rāzī there is an important difference between the grammatical subject of the sentence "Animal is a universal" and its logical subject, a maneuver that would be discussed at length by his commentators in the following centuries. Whereas for Avicenna the quiddity in its non-conditioned state sufficed for it to be regarded as a natural universal, Quṭb al-Dīn has shown through his critical analysis that the latter of these is, in fact, an object of thought that occurs at a later stage in the conceptualization process. One must first consider the grammatical subject *qua* itself before conceiving of it as a logical subject, and hence the quiddity *qua* itself precedes the conceptualization of the natural universal and cannot be identified with it, for that which is prior to something cannot be identical with it.

Yet although al-Rāzī's analysis proves interesting and historically significant, the fact remains that he too must face the question about the existence of natures *in re*, even if he deems the existence of the natural universal to be *in intellectu* only. This is so because although the natural universal, as al-Rāzī understands it, is an object with mental existence only, it could be argued that the grammatical subject on its own (i.e. quiddity *qua* itself) is still a representation of something that occurs naturally *in re*, except that it is no longer called "a natural universal." But this is soon made abundantly clear, and it is remarkable just how much al-Rāzī is averse to the existence of anything apart from individualized particulars in the external world.

59 The question of whether a proposition has three or four parts was debated at length by logicians of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See Khaled el-Rouayheb, "Does a Proposition have Three or Four Parts? A Debate in Later Arabic Logic," *Oriens* 44, no. 3-4 (2016): 301-31. It is interesting to note, however, that al-Rāzī contradicts himself in *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt*, for there he mentions that there are only three conceptualizations. See Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-kulliyyāt*, 25.

60 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār*, 1:183-84.

61 Ibid., 1:184. Each of the five Porphyrean universals are at least, hypothetically speaking, predicable of many and already quidditative notions conditioned with universality. As for the quiddity *qua* itself, this is not, according to al-Rāzī's analysis, a natural universal and therefore cannot yet be made into a potential subject for the reception of universality.

The first problem he identifies in Avicenna's thought concerns, as we have already seen, his predecessor's implicit assertion that the natural universal *is* the quiddity *qua* itself. Al-Rāzī, for the reasons already mentioned, thinks that this is problematic. In sum, had animal *qua* itself been a natural universal or a natural genus, then its being such would have been due to the fact, as al-Rāzī says, of its animalness only. But if this were so, then any individual that is an animal would by virtue of being an animal also have to be a natural universal or a natural genus, which is patently absurd. Zayd may be an animal, but *ipso facto* he is clearly not a natural universal.[62]

Second, if Avicenna holds that a natural universal denotes the nature of a thing *in re*, then, based on al-Rāzī's contention, there would no longer be any distinction between each of the five Porphyrean universals. This is so because Avicenna states that genus, species, specific difference, proprium, and accident are all natural universals. But if by this he means that they are simply natures, then this alone would not suffice in making apparent whatever distinctions must exist among them. The implication here, it seems, is that a natural species is its own genus and vice versa, which is clearly false. The point is that a natural universal cannot just be a nature *simpliciter*, but rather a nature that has been formulated for predication in the mind. As al-Rāzī himself explains: "If what it is intended by the natural universal is nature insofar [as] it is *a subject for universality*, as would be the case, for example, of a natural genus that is a nature formulated as subject for the predicate being-a-genus, then animal *qua* itself would not be a natural universal, but must in order to become such be qualified for predication (*lā budda min qayd al-'urūḍ*)."[63] It would appear that Quṭb al-Din has detected an uncritical identification in Avicenna's thought that none of al-Rāzī's predecessors had detected, namely, the identification of the non-conditioned quiddity and the natural universal. "The natural universal," he writes, "is not animal in respect of its nature, but rather, inasmuch as if it occurs in the mind, it is appropriate to be said of many."[64] Animal *qua* itself is only itself, but in order for it to become a natural universal, it must also, in addition to being conceptualized for what it is, be conceptualized as a logical subject so that it may then form part of a propositional statement in which it can be suited for receiving the predicate of universality.

62 Ibid., 1:182. The claim here appears to be based on the law of transitivity: If Zayd is an animal, and animal is a natural universal, then Zayd is a natural universal.

63 Ibid., 1:182.

64 Ibid.

But after saying all of this, Quṭb al-Din still has to respond to the lingering question of whether or not natural universals, either in the sense that Avicennan intends or the interpretation that he himself believes is more accurate, exist *in re*. To answer this, one should bear in mind that al-Rāzī's treatment of this question occurs in the context of his engagement with two prominent post-Avicennian logicians of the thirteenth century, Afḍal al-Dīn al-Khūnajī and Siraj al-Dīn al-Urmawī, both of whom follow Avicenna's argument from Book 1, Chapter 5 of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'*. The argument, as presented by al-Khūnajī, is as follows:

> What indicates that the [natural] universal exists in particulars in the external world is the fact that animal, for example, no doubt exists extramentally because it is a part of this external animal. Hence animal, which is a part of this animal, is either (*a*) identical to animal *qua* itself without qualification or (*b*) identical to animal *qua* itself with a qualification. But if it is the second, [then] it would comprise animal [inasmuch as it is only itself], and the division therefore would eventually revert to the first. Therefore, animal without any condition exists extramentally, it being the very thing whose conceptualization makes it predicable of many. So, in the external world exists something the very conceptualization of which does not prevent it from being common to many things. Thus the [natural] universal exists in extramental particulars.[65]

Al-Khūnajī's argument for the extramental existence of natural universals is identical to Avicenna's reasoning in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'*. The external particular is first imagined as a quiddity of some sort (in this case animal) to which attendant qualifications have been added so as to make the individualized particular. But this particular individual, al-Khūnajī argues, is itself a composite of quiddity *qua* itself and its extrinsic qualifications. Hence, because the composite animal exists, the bare notion of animal *simpliciter* must also exist, for the whole cannot exist without its part.

Like Avicenna, al-Khūnajī's argument is founded on the claim that animal *per se* is a part of this animal, and hence *ipso facto* there has to reside in extramental reality something that is a "universal," meaning here the non-conditioned form of the quiddity "animal" that is common to many things, albeit through numerical multiplicity, since each particular animal is a new instance of the same natural universal. The entire argument therefore hinges on two crucial premises: (*a*) that quiddity *qua* itself is the natural universal and (*b*) that the natural universal is a *part* of the natural thing. Having already seen what al-Rāzī has to say about the first premise, we now turn to what he thinks of Avicenna's second premise.

65 Al-Khūnajī, *Kashf al-asrār 'an ghawāmiḍ al-afkār*, 35-36.

But before doing so, it is worth mentioning that up to this point in his commentary al-Rāzī has cited all of the main personalities—Avicenna, al-Urmawī, and al-Khūnajī—who have argued in favor of the extramental existence of natural universals as part-universals. By citing past authorities, Quṭb al-Dīn thus sets the stage for his anti-realist critique of a cumulative tradition that has since Avicenna's time advocated a realist understanding of extramental natures, quiddities, and essences. He begins his critique with the conclusion itself: The proposition "the universal exists" (*al-kullī mawjūd*) can, on the one hand, be taken to mean that something that is common to many things exists in the external world. But this, as al-Rāzī quickly points out, is a logical intention and can therefore only arise once a nature is considered in the mind. Therefore, the proposition "the universal exists in extramental reality," correctly interpreted, means that "there is something in the external world that, when conceptualized in the mind, has universality occur to it."[66] A universal *qua* universal, therefore, has no extramental reference.

Yet though this may seem close to what Avicenna himself explicitly says about the logical and mental universal, al-Rāzī insists that his interpreters (viz. al-Khūnajī and al-Urmawī) apply this understanding to the natural universal itself. Indeed, the very assertion that the natural universal exists in particulars appears to want to make the extramental natures of things themselves common to many particulars, and not merely the conceptualization of them in the intellect's understanding.

Granted, this may be a criticism of Avicenna's thirteenth-century interpreters and not of Avicenna himself, but what al-Rāzī says afterward must be taken as an unequivocal attack on Avicenna. This is so because the claim that animal *qua* itself is *a part of this extramental animal* is itself the very thing being disputed, and thus to argue from it to the conclusion that animal *qua* itself exists in extramental particulars is a blatant form of circular reasoning.[67] Put another way, the claim that animal *qua* itself is a part of this animal itself needs proof, for that is the very thing whose existence is being questioned. If this were not enough, al-Rāzī also provides a succession of three quickly formulated dialectical responses to the existence of the non-conditioned animal *in re*.

First, suppose it were said that animal *qua* itself is an "intellectual" part of this animal considered in the mind, and hence it would be true that animal *qua*

66 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār*, 1:186.

67 Ibid., 1:187.

itself is a part of the mentally apprehended animal. Even so, al-Rāzī retorts that it is not always necessarily the case that intellectual parts should have a one-to-one correspondence with things themselves in the extramental world. Therefore, the argument as it stands is incomplete, because it is possible that something has a multitude of analytical parts in conceptualization but no parts whatsoever in external reality.[68]

Second, let it be granted that all intellectual parts and divisions refer extramentally. But this, as al-Rāzī shows, is confuted by negative attributes and privations such as blindness, which cannot themselves be real.[69]

Finally, why is it not simply true that this animal is at most just animal "with qualifications"? In other words, why go further and insist that since an animal *with qualifications* exists, an animal *without qualifications* should also exist? It seems to me that al-Rāzī is the first medieval Arabic thinker to reject both the modern notion of "bare particulars" and the medieval concept of "common natures." Indeed, as he states in his capacity as one of the foremost logicians of the post-classical period, if one begins the argument to prove the existence of natures *in re* with the assertion that animal *simpliciter* is a part of this animal, then why the need for the other premises, since what one wishes to prove is already asserted in the initial premise?

Al-Rāzī commits to a total rejection not only of the extramental existence of natural universals as he contends that they ought to be interpreted, but also of the non-conditioned quiddities and natures *tout court*. "What occurs to my mind," he says, "is that the natural universal has no existence in the external whatsoever, and that whatever exists externally are particulars and individuals only."[70] To stake his claim, he provides two main lines of criticism against Avicenna's ontological part-theory, the first of which is based on the mereological considerations of the natural universal and its relation to the individual particulars it constitutes *ex hypothesi* in extramental reality. If, according to Avicenna, the natural universal existed as a part of extramental individuals, then the natural universal would have had to exist in one of three necessary ways: either (*a*) as something that is identical to the individual itself, or (*b*) as a part of the external individual, or (*c*) as something extrinsic to the essence of the external particular. But all three possibilities are

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.

absurd. The first one would remove the distinction between natural particulars and thus lead to the absurd consequence that distinct individuals (e.g. Zayd and ʻAmr) are identical. If Zayd and ʻAmr are both identical to the natural universal "human," then by the rule of transitivity both of them would have to be identical, which is clearly nonsensical.[71]

On the other hand, if, as Avicenna argues, the natural universal is a part of individual particulars, then by the rule of metaphysical priority the part ought to precede the whole in existence. The great difficulty with Avicenna's part-theory is that although he explicitly asserts the ontological priority of the natural universal to the thing it constitutes, he nowhere clarifies which kind of priority this is. In any case, al-Rāzī dismisses the priority-thesis altogether because to him it implies that the part is other than the whole, and, ontologically speaking, whatever is other than the whole cannot from a logical standpoint be predicated of the whole.

Aside from his objections regarding the correct conception of the natural universal, al-Rāzī rejects Avicenna's theory of the existence of part-universals on the basis of conventional rules regarding the conditions of predication. Since predication implies a degree of ontological unity between the subject and its predicate, and moreover given that the ontological parts of things cannot be truthfully predicated of those things themselves, it follows that, according to Avicenna's theory, the natural universal cannot be predicated of the individual. If human *qua* human were thus regarded as an ontologically distinct part of Zayd, then one could never predicate humanity of Zayd.[72] The metaphysical reason for this is, as al-Rāzī explains, Avicenna's claim that natural universals are *parts* of their instantiated particulars. All parts must precede the wholes they constitute in existence, which, as a result, must imply that they are different from their wholes and thus cannot then be predicated of their wholes.[73] The third option (i.e. the

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 1:188.

73 It is this aspect of al-Rāzī's criticism that has perhaps generated the greatest amount of debate and controversy among later thinkers. Though Avicenna does describe the natural universal as a part of external things explicitly, he does not explicitly state whether or not it has its own separate existence apart from the existence of the whole. The restrictions of space do not allow me to go into this debate here. However, the best pre-modern critique of his position that I have come across is ʻAbd al-Razzāq al-Lāhijī, *Shawāriq al-ilhām fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-kalām*, ed. Akbar Asad ʻAlīzādah (Qom: Muʼassasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq, 1433 AH), 2:60-69. For al-Lāhijī, the natural universal is an intellectual part and thus avoids the problems mentioned by Quṭb al-Dīn.

natural universal is extrinsic to the particular) is "obviously impossible," given that the essence of a thing cannot lie outside of itself.[74]

The second argument for why, according to al-Rāzī, a natural universal cannot be an extramental part of the individuals it is supposed to constitute outside the mind is that had the natural universal been existent *in re*, it would have either been identical to the mere nature (*mujarrad al-ṭabīʿa*) of a thing itself without any further distinction, or it would denote the nature of a thing plus some other added qualification (*al-ṭabīʿa maʿa amr ākhar*). The first possibility leads to the absurd ontological consequence that a single nature that is supposedly numerically one (e.g. human) is found in multiple individuals (e.g. Zayd and ʿAmr) at the same time in different locations. Since the nature of humanity (*ṭabīʿat al-insān*) is found in all individual humans, and if humanity is but a single nature common to all of them and therefore numerically one, then it is difficult to see how one could reconcile the problem of the one and the many from an ontological perspective. How can one humanity be the cause of so many individuals, if neither the individuals are identical nor the nature of humanity multiplied in each individual instance of humanity?

Furthermore, al-Rāzī utilizes Avicenna's own argument against "common natures" to confute the latter's assertion that the natural universal exists *in re* by showing that a natural universal (by which is meant here the non-conditioned quiddity) that exists as a part of multiple individuals in the same species would have to be regarded as an ontological locus of properties that are contraries. If Zayd is black and ʿAmr is white, then the nature of humanity that forms a part of each of their existences would have to be a simultaneous locus for the predicate "white" and the predicate "black," implying that a numerically single nature is both black and white at the same time. This is clearly impossible.[75]

This leaves option two: The natural universal is not just some nature by itself, but rather a nature plus some added thing. However, according to al-Rāzī, this is also impossible because if every individual (e.g. Zayd) is a constituent of two things (i.e., nature plus something else), then the two of these would either exist due to a single existence or because of two individual existences. The first possibility must be denied because a single existence cannot be ontologically subsistent through two individually distinct loci (*qiyām al-shayʾ al-wāḥid bi-maḥallayn mukhtalifayn […] muḥāl*). Likewise, if what is actually existent is the aggregate (*majmūʿ*) of a nature and

74 Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʿ al-asrār*, 1:188.

75 Ibid.

whatever else is added to it, then it is the aggregate that is, properly speaking, the existent (*al-mawjūd*) and not the individual parts.[76]

The final possibility, then, is that both the nature and whatever else is added to it have two distinct individual existences, each one made subsistent by its own independent locus. However, this being so, the absence of a unity of existence between the parts in the instantiation would imply, from a logical standpoint, that one can no longer predicate either part of its aggregate. All possibilities are thus bound up with impossible consequences, leading to the conclusion that the original premise, namely, that the natural universal is a part of extramental individuals, must be false and its contradictory premise true.[77]

Al-Rāzī's discussion ends in the least equivocal terms. Responding to the counter-objection that one cannot deny the certain existence of animality in the external world, he retorts by simply stating that what is certain is that "animal exists in the sense that the referent of 'animal' exists; as for the nature of animality existing [extramentally] that is to be denied, let alone being judged as something the existence of which is necessary."[78] The denial of extramental natures and natural universals is not just anti-Avicennan, but also anti-Aristotelian to the core, and thus a crucially important departure from mainstream Peripatetic philosophy. His systematic rejection of the existence of natural universals *in re* marks a significantly important moment in the history of post-Avicennan thought that would leave its mark on later thinkers. Owing to his eminence as a key logician of the later periods of Islamic intellectual history, his meticulous critique of Avicenna's theory of part-universals sparked debates and discussions among intellectuals far and wide until the modern period. That being said, al-Rāzī does not deny the mental existence of universal concepts and cannot therefore be branded a "nominalist" in the strictest sense of the term. Nevertheless, all such ideas and concepts are mentally derived, intellectually formed by the rational soul, and none, according to this fourteenth-century Islamic thinker, has an existence in external things themselves.

76 Al-Rāzī appears to be basing his claim on the assertion that quiddities are prior to existence (*aṣālat al-māhiyya*), a view that would be later criticized by the Safavid philosopher Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī.

77 Ibid., 1:188.

78 Ibid.

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