

Damien Janos. *Avicenna on the Ontology of Pure Quiddity*. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2020. 762 pages. ISBN: 9783110635980.

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This hefty volume by Damien Janos promises a novel reconstruction of the Avicennian concept of pure quiddity, quiddity as it is in itself, or to use a term coined in the concept's reception, the natural universal. Questions revolving around the concept were the sustained focus of generations of post-Avicennian authors in both the Islamic world and Europe, and as Janos recognizes, quite a bit of modern scholarship exists on this as well. Thus, the questions the book aims to answer are familiar to students of Avicennian metaphysics: Is Avicenna's (d. 428/1037) distinction between essence and existence intended as a real distinction or a merely conceptual one? What is the ontological status of essence as such (i.e., pure quiddity)? How do logical and ontological concerns interrelate in Avicenna's discussion of pure quiddity? Finally, what is the function of pure quiddity in Avicenna's theology: Does God know pure quiddities in addition to His own essence, and is God's essence an instance of pure quiddity?

Earlier research notwithstanding, Janos builds on the observation that no interpretation satisfactorily addresses all these concerns, and thus he provides a systematic account of pure quiddity in all areas of Avicenna's philosophy. Considering the book's length of more than 700 pages, one might think that this gap is simply because until now, no scholar had ventured to undertake the forbidding task of tracing all the consequences of the various applications of the concept of pure quiddity. While a considerable part of the book's volume is deservedly due to the breadth and depth of Janos' analysis, I think a fair

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assessment would also be that quite a bit of repetition and overlap exists among the book's chapters. Moreover, some of the offshoots of the discussion, such as the rather sketchy surveys of Avicenna's reception appended to each chapter, could have been excluded for the benefit of increased focus without any real compromise to the book's impressive scope. As it is, readers must be rather devoted Avicennians if they are to sift through all the material and get a clear idea of the book's central claim. Ultimately, however, the relative verbosity is amply compensated for by the substantive contributions Janos makes in the book; two largely unprecedented examples are his thorough discussion of pure quiddity in the mind and his analysis of the relation between Avicenna's theory of pure quiddity and Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbā'ī's (d. 321/933) concept of *ṣifat al-dhāt*. Furthermore, the book should not only be welcomed for these contributions, as Janos' reconstruction of Avicenna's metaphysics is one of the most ambitious attempts at reconciling all the central pieces of textual evidence, and even if some important aspects of the reconstruction remain controversial, it is a substantial addition to the increasingly refined scholarship on Avicenna's philosophical system.

Janos' central claim is that, in addition to concrete existence and mental existence, which he gathers under the common heading of *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, a third type of existence is found distinct from either of the other two: the proper existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) which belongs to pure quiddity alone and on its own. This interpretation is based on a robust reading of the texts in which Avicenna presents his famous threefold division of existence (especially *Madkhal* I.12).¹ It challenges the prominent interpretation that takes quiddity and *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* to be coextensive and proper existence as just a manner of considering (*i 'tibār*) quiddities apart from their existence or as a mind-dependent concept that has no place in Avicenna's foundational ontology (32–34). The latter interpretation, which takes its cue from *Ilāhiyāt* I.5, is often conjoined with a mereological interpretation of both concrete and mental existents as composites of quiddity (with its concomitant properties) and extrinsically caused existence (with the accidents consequent to it).² According to Janos, his interpretation of pure quiddity is better equipped for solving the enduring tensions in Avicenna's epistemology, theology, and metaphysics concerning

1 I will refer to this edition of the work: Ibn Sinā, *al-Shifā' al-Manṭiq 1: al-Madkhal*, eds. Georges C. Anawati, Maḥmūd al-Khuḍayrī, and Fawwār al-Ahwānī (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-amiriya, 1952).

2 I will refer to this edition of the work: Michael E. Marmura, *Avicenna, The Metaphysics of the Healing. Al-Shifā': al-Ilāhiyāt, A Parallel English-Arabic Text Translated, Introduced, and Annotated* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005).

questions over the various types of universal, the theory of psychological abstraction, and the theory of God's knowledge of particulars. In the end, pure quiddity turns out to be the centerpiece of Avicenna's philosophical system.

In the following, I refrain from a systematic paraphrase of Janos' painstakingly thorough argumentation. Instead, I aim at a concise overview of each of the book's main chapters and then focus on some of the problems I see in Janos' interpretation. I realize the review may be somewhat unhelpful to the reader looking for a thorough survey of the book's contents, but I trust that this is compensated for if I can unearth at least some matters of genuine philosophical controversy for future discussion.

The view that pure quiddities have special ontological status and a proper existence distinct from concrete existence and mental existence is close to the interpretation of some of Avicenna's medieval Latin readers and, consequently, to that of neo-Thomist scholars like Amélie-Marie Goichon (d. 1977), who located this proper existence (or "divine" existence, as Avicenna also called it) in God's mind. Such a view needs to tackle several difficult questions, which Janos lays out in the book's introductory first chapter (41–45) as: (1) whether existence in a divine intellect is sufficiently different from existence in the human mind to merit being called a type of existence distinct from mental existence, (2) whether quiddities in a divine intellect are universal and thus composites of quiddity and universality, instead of *pure* quiddities, (3) how the proper existence of pure quiddities is related to their concrete and mental existence, (4) whether the plurality of pure quiddities in God's mind violates God's simplicity, and (5) whether the contingency of the pure quiddities in God's mind violates God's necessity. All these questions are addressed in the book's central chapters. Chapter II argues pure quiddity to be a mental existent distinct from the universal concept, of which it is a part – an important aspect of Questions (1) and (2). Chapter III addresses Question (3) by investigating how one can perceive concrete quiddities and in what sense pure quiddities can be said to exist concretely. Chapter IV then turns to arguing for the proper existence of the pure quiddity apart from the human mind, and Chapter V concludes by tackling the theological Questions (4) and (5).

In Chapter II, Janos takes his cue from *Madkhal* I.2 by arguing for the view that pure quiddity exists in the mind distinct from its semantic relation to its concrete instantiations, which together with the pure quiddity constitutes the universal concept. In this chapter and as echoed by *Ilāhiyāt* V.1, Avicenna famously distinguishes between three ways in which quiddity can be considered: (i) "inasmuch as it is that very quiddity unconnected to either mode of existence,"

(ii) “insofar as it is in concrete beings, in which case there are accidents attached to it that specify its existence,” and (iii) “insofar as it is in the mind, in which case there are accidents attached to it that specify its existence” (*Madkhal* I.2, 15; Janos’ translations, 80). This distinction suggests that only the quiddity taken together with the mental accidents can be identified with a mentally existing quiddity. Later in *Madkhal* I.12, however, Avicenna claims that a quiddity can be conceived in the mind without the logical concomitants that are specific to mental existence, such as its being a genus, species, particular, or universal. On this basis, Janos argues that pure quiddity can exist in the mind and, furthermore, since it is a constitutive part of the composite mental existent that it forms together with the logical concomitants, it *must* do so (128–48). He also introduces as corroborative evidence *Ilāhiyāt* V.1, where Avicenna states, “The consideration of quiddity in itself is possible, even if it is with something else” (Janos’ translation, 165), and makes the famous distinction between conceiving the quiddity *lā bi-sharṭi shay’* (irrespective of whether it is accompanied by concomitant properties) and conceiving it *bi-sharṭi lā-shay’* (without any concomitant properties), stating that quiddity in the latter sense, which pertains to pure quiddity, can only exist in the mind. For Janos, these pieces of evidence contradict the mereological interpretation, according to which pure quiddity only exists as an irreducible part of the concrete and the mental composite. By contrast, the passages show pure quiddity to not only be irreducible, but to also be a distinct mental existent.

This makes eminent sense. Because merely conceiving (*taṣawwur*) a quiddity without considering its semantic relation to the world (which is a matter of *taṣḍīq*) is possible, it seems that the quiddity must also be able to exist in the mind without the semantic property of universality. It is important to notice, however, that “universality” can be understood in two different senses. If universality is understood as being actually predicated of (or semantically related to) multiple instantiations, clearly a merely conceived quiddity is not universal. But if universality is taken to amount to potential predicability of many instantiations, then even a merely conceived quiddity must have universality as a necessarily concomitant property. Janos recognizes this distinction (212–21), holding that when pure quiddity exists in the mind as distinct from the universal concept, it remains universal in the sense of being potentially predicabile of many. I find this interpretation quite convincing, and in general, Chapter II is one of the strongest parts of the book; however, I wonder whether Janos needs to endorse a modest version of the mereological interpretation. After all, taking universality, even in the sense of potential predicability, as anything but a mental concomitant of pure

quiddity is difficult. Because predicability cannot be constitutive of quiddity and is a part of the mentally existing quiddity rather than of the concretely existing quiddity, the mentally existing quiddity turns out to be a compound of pure quiddity (understood as nothing but its constitutive features) and the mental concomitant of predicability.

Chapter III turns to investigate pure quiddity in concrete existence. Janos begins by establishing that pure quiddities do exist concretely, as they should if the formal identity between the extramental and mental quiddities is to provide the epistemological bridge between the mind and the world (271–326). He presents ample evidence from *Ilāhiyāt*, *Nafs*, and *Najāt* for this claim, arguing that the concrete existence of pure quiddities is best conceived mereologically, with pure quiddity constituting the concrete entity alongside the various accidents the entity has, both by virtue of its essence and by virtue of the complete cause of its existence. Were pure quiddities to have concrete existence distinct from the concrete things they constitute, they would be equivalent to Platonic Forms, which Avicenna expressly rejects.

More controversial than the argument for the existence of quiddities as constitutive parts of mereological compounds is Janos' claim that pure quiddities can be identified with the formal parts of hylomorphic compounds (301–26). The problem with the identification between the two metaphysical compounds (i.e., the compound of constituents, and the compound of form and matter) is that, because not only the *infimae species* but also their genera (and possibly their differentiae) higher in the Porphyrian tree are quiddities, every hylomorphic compound would have a plurality of distinct forms – a view that Abraham Stone, Kara Richardson, and Andreas Lammer have argued to be alien to Avicenna.³ With puzzling nonchalance, Janos presents this consequence as a matter of preference: “In this manner, animal-form and human-form can be posited as substantial forms in the concrete individual, inasmuch as their rank and degree of ontological specification would differ. Or, alternatively, they can be posited as quidditative meanings (*ma'āni*) subsumed within a single form, if one intends to shun a pluralist model of the substantial forms”

3 Abraham Stone, “Simplicius and Avicenna on the Essential Corporeity of Material Substance,” *Aspects of Avicenna*, ed. Robert Wisnovsky (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 73-130; Kara Richardson, “Avicenna and Aquinas on Form and Generation,” *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics*, eds. Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 251-74; Andreas Lammer, *The Elements of Avicenna's Physics: Greek Sources and Arabic Innovations* (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 165-79.

(310). These are not innocent alternatives but two fundamentally different theories that have contradictory consequences for the present topic of discussion; only the first alternative allows a neat correspondence between the two kinds of compound. To be fair, Janos does engage with Lammer's argument against the plurality of forms (320–21), but his defense of plurality hinges on the identification of form with pure quiddity, which is the precise point of controversy. To me, at least, holding that the concepts of form and pure quiddity, although related, belong to two rather different analyses remains plausible: "form" is applied to explain the diachronic identity of a concrete thing, whereas "pure quiddity" is designed to account for the constitution of the thing's essence. Moreover, as Janos recognizes (322–24), plenty of textual evidence exists that conflicts with the view that the constituents of *infimae species* are hylomorphic forms on their own.⁴

Having shown that pure quiddity as a mereological part of the concrete compound provides the extramental relatum of the correspondence relation, Janos turns to the question of whether the pure quiddity in concrete existence is intelligible. He argues for the strikingly strong claim that quiddity in concrete existence is not only potentially intelligible in the sense that it can be abstracted in human conception, but *actually* understood (326–42), which he claims is required for the correspondence between the extramental and the mental instantiations of the quiddity. Here, one naturally asks what is the subject of the intellectual act that makes pure quiddity in concrete existence *actually* understood independent of human minds? Due to the concrete quiddity's inability to understand itself, very few options remain. Moreover, why the correspondence between mental and extramental instantiations of quiddity should require concrete quiddity to be actually understood is unclear, for even if concrete quiddity were not actually understood, its having an origin in an intellectual principle would be sufficient for grounding its future intelligibility by a human mind. If intelligibility is meant in some more modest sense, it is difficult to see how this is distinct from being a potential object of intellection – which is quite uncontroversial.

Chapter IV addresses the question of whether pure quiddity has a distinct mode of existence even apart from the human mind. Janos argues that it does and

4 There is, of course, another sense in which a plurality of forms is possible, for material mixtures (*amzija*) are composites of elemental forms that retain their identity in the state of mixture and contribute their causal powers to it. This, however, is different from the plurality of forms that allegedly corresponds to the plurality of the constituents of a quiddity. One could say that even in this qualified sense, only a plurality of *infima species* is possible.

that the *wujūd khāṣṣ* Avicenna attributes to pure quiddity is independent of the two kinds of *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* (i.e., concrete existence and existence in the mind). The argument begins with a somewhat speculative interpretation of Avicenna's formulation in *Ilāhīyāt* I.5 that quiddity may exist "in the concrete extramental world, or in the soul, or absolutely [in a way that] is common to both (*muṭlaqan ya 'ummuhā jamī'an*)" (Janos' translation, 426–27). Instead of reading the third alternative as meaning "without further qualifications" and applying to both mental and concrete existence, Janos suggests that absolute existence here may denote a third kind of existence that is unique to pure quiddity. This is corroborated by the famous passage from *Ilāhīyāt* V.1, where Avicenna states that quiddity is prior to the concrete compound in the way a simple constituent is prior to the composite of which it is a constituent; pure quiddity in this sense has "divine" existence because the cause of its existence is divine providence.

The big question is how to make sense of this type of existence that is proper to pure quiddity yet coincides with neither concrete nor mental existence. Janos proposes the key here to be Avicenna's theory of *tashkīk*. Alexander Treiger has argued that, using this notion, Avicenna adapted the Aristotelian *pros hen* predication, which was originally applied to explain how existence is predicated in a prior sense of substances and in a derivative sense of things in the other categories, in order to make sense of the relation between God's existence and the existence of creatures.⁵ Janos' new claim is that the proper existence (*wujūd khāṣṣ*) of pure quiddity overlaps with the primary sense of existence predicated of God; in other words, God and pure quiddities have *wujūd khāṣṣ*, whereas all other things have derivative *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*. In Janos' words, this is "a tantalizing thought" (458), but the evidence for it is unfortunately rather slim. As far as I can see, one solid argument exists for this interpretation: according to Avicenna, just as God is prior in existence to everything else, pure quiddity also is prior in existence to the compound it forms together with the concrete or mental accidents, and priority is a crucial aspect of *tashkīki* predication.⁶ A critic might point out here that a constituent's priority in existence

5 Alexander Treiger, "Avicenna's Notion of Transcendental Modulation of Existence (*tashkīk al-wuḡūd*) and Its Greek and Arabic Sources," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 21 (2010): 165-98.

6 Janos does mention two other pieces of possible evidence: (1) God's existence is prior because it is essential to Him, and likewise the *wujūd khāṣṣ* belongs to pure quiddities by virtue of themselves; and (2) in *'Uyūn al-ḥikma*, Avicenna explains the concept of substance in terms of quiddity, and due to substance being central to the original Aristotelian concept of *tashkīk*, one may presume quiddity to be the same. These deserve more detailed attention; suffice to say, however, (1) depends strongly on Janos' controversial interpretation, whereas (2) is highly circumstantial and must be substantiated.

does not entail its independence in terms of existence from what it constitutes. For instance, think of the constituents of an *infima species*: as constituents, they are prior to the species because, were it not for those constituents, the species would not be what it is, and yet the constituents can only exist by virtue of the determined species of which they are constitutive parts. If this is correct, then a strictly mereological interpretation, which rejects the *wujūd khāṣṣ* of pure quiddity as a distinct mode of existence, has the upper hand: as a constituent of the concrete compound, pure quiddity is prior by nature to the compound; however, this does not have to mean it has priority in the sense of distinct existence, because it only exists as a part of the compound. Janos recognizes this but points out how Avicenna in *Madkhal* I.12 had spoken of pure quiddity's existence prior to multiplicity, and this should be understood as a commitment to the Neoplatonic idea that simplicity is metaphysically prior to multiplicity and exists independently from it. Thus, pure quiddity must have its *wujūd khāṣṣ*, perhaps in the separate intellects and in God's intellect, and this proper existence is distinct from the concrete and mental *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* (471–72, 487–88, 500–1.) On this basis, Janos goes on to claim that Avicenna's distinction between essence and existence only holds between pure quiddity and its *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, not between quiddity and its *wujūd khāṣṣ* and, consequently, not between quiddity and existence in an absolute sense (531–36). This allows Janos to state essence and existence to be coextensive, albeit not coextensive in terms of *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*.

Janos' interpretation has the asset that it allows a literal reading of passages such as *Madkhal* I.12, which attributes pure quiddity a third metaphysical status, distinct from either concrete or mental existence. On the other hand, however, it has troublesome consequences of its own. By way of illustration, consider the way in which Avicenna grounds the modal properties in his distinction between essence and existence. On 537–39, Janos charges contemporary scholars (only citing Emann Allebban's 2018 dissertation as an example) with the tendency to take contingency as an intrinsic property of quiddities. This is in striking contrast to Janos' own view, for if pure quiddities have proper existence by virtue of themselves as he claims, then their proper existence is necessary, not contingent. Janos responds by introducing highly convincing textual evidence against the view that the modal properties are intrinsic to quiddities in the sense of being constitutive of them (*Ilāhīyāt* V.1.4, 149; V.1.7, 153; *Mubāḥathāt*⁷ §§867–68, 309–10). The strength

7 I have consulted this edition of the work: Ibn Sinā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Muḥsin Bidārfar (Qom: Intishārāt-e Bidārfar, 1413 H.).

of evidence notwithstanding, Janos quite obviously gives too short a shrift to the alternative view. Two kinds of essential (*dhātī*) properties are commonly recognized to exist: some essential properties are constitutive of quiddity, whereas others are concomitant to it.⁸ If intrinsic means constitutive, holding that modal properties are intrinsic to quiddities is hardly a commonplace view. Yet as a concomitant property, the modal property of being contingent with respect to existence by virtue of itself is such that a quiddity cannot fail to have it. Now, if quiddity has proper existence by virtue of itself, then the modal property of contingency can only hold for its *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*. Thus, it follows from Janos' interpretation that quiddities can have different modal properties with respect to their *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* only because they have a prior, intrinsic, and thus necessary *wujūd khāṣṣ*.

This is problematic, for it threatens to invalidate what is arguably the central application of Avicenna's modal theory: his proof for the existence of God as the necessary ground of all contingent being. Janos claims God's essence to be His *wujūd khāṣṣ*, which is unique to Him. Unlike pure quiddities, however, God has no *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, which is restricted to things that owe their existence to another. Thus, what distinguishes God from pure quiddities that also have *wujūd khāṣṣ* is that the latter can receive *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* either concretely or in the mind, whereas God may not. Consider Avicenna's proof now. If pure quiddities have their *wujūd khāṣṣ* by themselves (i.e., by being identical to their proper existence), their contingency is only with respect to *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*. This means that their primary modal property is identical to God's. By contrast, their secondary modal property (i.e., their contingency with respect to *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*) has no parallel in God. Now, Avicenna's proof for God's existence hinges on inference from things, the existence of which is contingent with respect to themselves, to their ground, or to that which exists necessarily by virtue of itself; for this inference, predicating existence consistently in a single sense seems crucial. Of course, this single sense is *tashkīkī*, for God has this existence primarily due to having it by virtue of being Himself, whereas contingent beings have it secondarily because they have it by virtue of another. My point is that this is still univocity in comparison to Janos' interpretation.⁹ If we abandon this line of thought, Avicenna can only claim that

8 For a thorough study, see Strobino's work, who prefers to speak of *per se* properties. Riccardo Strobino, "Per se, Separability, Containment and Implication: Bridging the Gap between Avicenna's Theory of Demonstration and Logic of the Predicables," *Oriens* 44/3-4 (2016): 181-266.

9 Janos has recently argued at length against univocal *tashkīk* and in favor of equivocal *tashkīk*. Damien Janos, "Avicenna on Equivocity and Modulation: A Reconsideration of the *asmā' mushakkika* (and *tashkīk al-wujūd*)," *Oriens* 50/1-2 (2021): 1-62.

the existence of contingent quiddities must be grounded in something that does not exist at all in the sense under consideration, although it does exist necessarily in another sense – but then, so do the contingent quiddities themselves. How anyone in their sound critical mind could be convinced by such a “proof” is difficult to see and given the centrality of Avicenna’s *burhān al-ṣiddiqīn*, this counts as a decisive argument against Janos’ interpretation in my book, particularly because the mereological alternative, according to which pure quiddity exists as a distinct but inseparable part of concrete and mental compounds, is consistent and very well suited to the proof.

Towards the end of Chapter IV (615–25), Janos makes another controversial claim: all pure quiddities are substances. He bases this claim on a survey of texts, which state that a concrete substance is a substance by virtue of its quiddity. Janos uses this as evidence for the claim that pure quiddity is equivalent to substantiality and, consequently, that pure quiddities in categories other than ‘substance’ must also be substances. This is corroborated by texts from *Maqūlāt* II.2 and the corresponding section in the *Mukhtaṣar al-awsaṭ fi l-manṭiq*, which state accidentality to be accidental to these categories, as well as a passage from the *Ḥudūd*, in which Avicenna states all quiddities, including quiddities like blackness, to be able to be called substances. As far as I can see, the evidence is far from decisive, especially for such a striking claim. The texts Janos surveys simply state that a concretely existing substance belongs to the category of substance by virtue of its quiddity, but this is entirely unproblematic because substance is the highest genus of its quiddity and thus constitutive of it. Relying on the same principle, one could say that a concretely existing color is a quality by virtue of its quiddity, because quality is constitutive of color. Further material from the *Maqūlāt* and the *Mukhtaṣar al-awsaṭ* is also readily explicable. Accidentality is not a genus of the non-substantial categories, and accidentality is consequently not a part of the Porphyrian tree that constitutes the quiddities under these categories. Instead of being a genus, accident is a transcendental (or trans-categorical) notion that, together with its complement substance, applies to all created beings.¹⁰ It is important to notice here that ‘substance’ is equivocal, for it can be said of the category and of a part in the transcendental distinction between substantial and accidental being. Although the category concept extensionally overlaps with the transcendental concept

10 On transcendental concepts in Avicenna, see Tiana Koutzarova, *Das Transzendente bei Ibn Sīnā* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

of substance (all things that fall under the category of substance are substantial beings in the transcendental sense), the two senses are not identical: one is a genus and thus part of the quiddity, whereas the other is a division of existent. This distinction is clearer with the other categories, for none of the non-substantial highest genera overlap with accidentality. True, each concrete instance that falls under one of the non-substantial categories will exist as an accident by virtue of its quiddity, yet its existence as an accident is not a constitutive part of its quiddity but rather concomitant to it. Most importantly, none of this entails that quiddities in these categories are substances.¹¹

Janos' controversial interpretation is motivated by the conviction that it frees Avicenna from a famous conundrum, namely that the same quiddity (e.g., horse-ness) is a substance when it exists concretely and an accident when it exists in the mind (582–84). Avicenna's famous answer to this dilemma was that accidents in the mind are such that were they to exist concretely, they would fall under the categories that figure in their constitution. If one accepts this, it is difficult to see how Janos' interpretation, in which all pure quiddities are substances in their *wujūd khāṣṣ* but may be either substances or accidents in their *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, contributes to an improved solution: quiddities in the category of substance will still be both substances and accidents in *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*. On the contrary, Janos' interpretation faces the additional task of explaining how quiddities in categories other than substance can be both substances (in their *wujūd khāṣṣ*) and accidents (in their *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*).

The fifth and final chapter of the book digs deeper into the question of the divine existence of pure quiddities: how do they exist in God's mind and how do they exist in separate intellects? Janos argues that his reconstruction of pure quiddity in the prior chapters of the book is best equipped to deal with the problem of God's knowledge of created things. He begins in Chapter V.1.1 (631–47) by pointing out that God and separate intellects only know pure quiddities, not the universal concepts in the human mind, which are complex entities unfit to serve as objects of a unified divine intellect. In Chapter V.1.2 (647–57), Janos elaborates on how pure quiddities do not violate God's unity. Because pure quiddities in their *wujūd khāṣṣ* are devoid of any of the concomitants they would have in *wujūd muḥaṣṣal*, they lack numerical unity and

11 This still leaves the problematic text from the *Hudūd*, but constraints of space and time force me to postpone judgment about it. In any case, it remains an anomaly at best and should be interpreted in line with the central texts, if possible.

multiplicity, which are among those concomitants. Thus, not being either one or many, they can merge with God without compromising His unity.

This is an interesting and novel idea but has some problematic consequences that Janos does not address. If pure quiddities lack the sort of metaphysical unity that is a transcendental concomitant of all existing things, how can they be distinct objects of thought in God's mind? It is important to note here that this transcendental sense of unity is different from the numerical unity and multiplicity of the instantiations of a quiddity; in my mind, Avicenna's statement that quiddities lack unity and multiplicity is more naturally interpreted as saying they are neither multiply nor uniquely instantiated by virtue of themselves. Thus, nothing in the quiddity of the Moon prevents multiple instantiation; this is only prevented by the extrinsic conditions of the Moon's existence. Likewise, nothing in the quiddity of horse necessitates multiple instantiation, only the extrinsic conditions of the existence of horses do. By contrast, pure quiddity's distinctness from this concomitance of the numerical unity or multiplicity of instantiations does not mean that it would not be one in its *wujūd khāṣṣ*. If the Moon's quiddity were not one in this sense, it could not be a quiddity distinct from the quiddity of, say, horse. Now, if each pure quiddity is one in this sense, then the pure quiddities do constitute a multiplicity even in their *wujūd khāṣṣ*; why such a multiplicity among the objects of God's intellection should not threaten to compromise God's unity is not at all clear.

On the other hand, Janos interprets Avicenna's famous claim that God knows particulars "in a universal way" within the framework of causal explanation highlighted by material from the *Ta'liqāt*, stating God's knowledge of pure quiddities to include knowledge of their concomitants (659–60). He concludes aporetically, however, and states that knowledge of the concomitants of quiddities will not yield knowledge of particulars in any meaningful sense of the word, an exception being celestial things that are the sole instantiations of their species, as Michael Marmura (d. 2009) pointed out in his seminal paper.¹² In order to know the particular, one needs to know its individuating accidents, which are not entailed by its pure quiddity.

It is not quite clear how the idea that God knows the concomitants of pure quiddities tallies with Janos' earlier claim that God's unity is not violated by His

12 Michael E. Marmura, "Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82/3 (1962): 299-312.

knowledge of pure quiddities, *because their multiple concomitants are not included in it*. Another puzzling feature of Janos' causal interpretation of God's universal knowledge of particulars is that he neglects Avicenna's explicit claim (in the very passages introduced from the *Ta'liqāt* in Chapter V, 658–59) that God *does* know the individuating accidents down to the minutest detail. It is true that Avicenna rejects God's access to the individual when considered as an ostensible concrete thing (or a *mushār ilayhi*), but this need not mean that God lacks knowledge of the individual altogether; it only rules out a certain way of knowing the individual, namely, knowing it from within the spatiotemporal framework the individual inhabits. In contrast, God knows the individual from outside of the spatiotemporal framework of the created world by knowing the entire network of causes that necessitates the individual. This knowledge is universal in the sense that whenever (*kullamā*) such a network of causes is given, an individual with these precise properties necessarily comes into being. Perhaps the reason why Janos withdraws from this solution to the question of God's knowledge of particulars is that it is not compatible with his interpretation of pure quiddities or their role in God's knowledge. The individuating accidents, just like the causal network of the world, is not a part of the *wujūd khāṣṣ* to which Janos confines God's knowledge (691–95). Instead, it only pertains to the *wujūd muḥaṣṣal* that belongs to the instantiations of quiddities. Interpreted in this way, the texts from the *Ta'liqāt* read as evidence in challenge of Janos' interpretation.

To conclude, some of the problems I have pointed out, especially those concerning Avicenna's modal metaphysics, are so serious that I find it difficult to accept Janos' reconstruction of Avicenna's concept of pure quiddity. It seems to me that a straightforward mereological view that takes pure quiddities as irreducible but not distinct parts of both concrete and mental existents and that interprets God's knowledge as a token of mental existence is better equipped to deal with the various theoretical roles in which Avicenna casts his concept of pure quiddity. The mereological interpretation is also more economical, and thus theoretically the more virtuous. Textual evidence does exist that is difficult to reconcile with the mereological interpretation, and Janos does an admirable job in not only highlighting this material, but also in attempting to come up with an alternative designed to deal with *all* the evidence. In the end, however, the prospects of reconciling the difficult texts with the mereological interpretation appear to me more promising than those of tackling the fundamental theoretical problems Janos' interpretation must face.

Having said that, Janos' discussion of the status of pure quiddity in concrete and mental existence is the most thorough to date and will provide a solid starting point for future work in this area. The book brings together most, if not all, of the material and questions related to the concept of pure quiddity. It also explains how the different questions are interrelated and what is at stake when one attempts to answer them in isolation. Finally, Janos' study of the Ḥāshimite background of Avicenna's concept of pure quiddity is an invaluable contribution on its own. For these reasons, the aforementioned differences notwithstanding, Janos' book deserves the attention of any serious scholar of Avicennian metaphysics.