

Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī on Ontological Preponderance (*al-Tarajjuḥ*) and Ontological Suitability (*al-Awlawiyya*)

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*Translated by Cem Türköz***

Abstract: This article focuses on the classical debates around the major premise of Avicenna's argument for God's existence, namely that one of the two sides of the contingent preponderates over the other through a preponderating cause. In the article, I first discuss the principle of sufficient reason and the definition of contingency from Avicenna's perspective and then the issue of ontological preponderance (*tarajjuḥ*, *rujḥān*) from the perspectives of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī. Here I will explore whether or not preponderance can remain within the limit of contingency. Afterwards, I introduce Rāzī's novel concept of ontological suitability (*awlawiyya*), discuss the different types of ontological suitability, and examine whether the contingent is suitable for existence or nonexistence by virtue of its essence. I also discuss whether ontological suitability for existence and nonexistence can be viewed as modalities of existence alongside necessity, contingency, and impossibility. I then introduce in the following section Samarqandī's survey of the alternative positions on ontological suitability and present his appraisal of these positions. I show that, according to Samarqandī, flowing contingents are essentially suitable for nonexistence, some contingents are suitable for nonexistence because they occur with fewer conditions, and others are suitable for existence because they occur more frequently. In the final section, I discuss the implications of Samarqandī's views for contingency, causality, and the principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle.

Keywords: Ibn Sīnā, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, contingent, flowing contingent, preponderance, *rujḥān*, ontological suitability, *awlawiyya*, argument from contingency

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Introduction

In the history of Islamic thought, many arguments have been advanced to prove the necessary existent. One of these arguments is Ibn Sinā's argument from contingency. This argument is premised on the definition of the essentially contingent, the impossibility of the preponderance of either the existence or nonexistence side of the contingent without a sufficient reason (*murajjih*), and the absurdity of infinite regress and circularity. An argument's strength is based on the validity of its premises and its fulfillment of formal conditions. Thus, after its introduction, scholars examined the premises of the argument from contingency and tried to gauge its strengths and weaknesses accordingly. One discussion that took place in this context centered on the definition of the contingent and the ontological preponderance and suitability of existence or nonexistence in its nature.

One may wonder what the point of discussing the ontological preponderance and suitability of the sides of the contingent is, given that Ibn Sinā had defined the contingent as neutral toward both with respect to its essence. In fact, the discussion is about whether one can suggest an alternate definition to replace this definition of neutral toward both extremes with respect to its essence. For instance, can one conceive of a contingent that has left the state of neutrality either by virtue of its essence or by an external cause, but has not yet reached the limit of impossibility or necessity? This question has important ramifications about whether or not the existence of the contingent occurs by coincidence, the significance of the principle of causality by which the contingent is brought into existence (or nonexistence), the impossibility of the occurrence of either side of the contingent without an external cause, and whether or not the contingent has a preponderance and suitability that arises from its essence.

Many of these issues first came to be recognized thanks to the questions that Rāzī directed at the argument from contingency, while scholars in the post-Rāzian era continued to seek resolutions to these issues, raised further questions, and formulated new positions. Samarqandī was one important scholar who dealt with these problems in the post-Rāzian tradition.

The overarching aim of these scholars' discussions was to identify potential objections against the contingency argument for God's existence and then respond to them to make the argument stronger. More specifically, the aim of their efforts was to determine, long before the criticisms Hume and others directed at this principle, the questions that would help ascertain whether one could accept the principle of

sufficient reason, the major premise of the argument from contingency, without contradiction. Thus, they discussed whether the argument from contingency and its major premise in particular could be considered a self-evident principle of reason, exposed the weak points of the argument, and tried to amend them.

Samarqandī addressed in his *Bishārāt al-Ishārāt*, *al-Şaḥāʾif al-Ilāhiyya*, and *al-Maʾārif fī sharḥ al-Şaḥāʾif* these issues that had originated in the works of Ibn Sīnā and Rāzī. By focusing on these works, this article presents Samarqandī's main discussions on the major premise of the argument from contingency, namely the premise that one side of the contingent preponderates over the other only through a preponderating cause (*murajjih*).

Modalities of Existence: Necessity, Contingency, and Impossibility

When the intellect conceives of the essence of a thing, it considers the thing to be either necessary, impossible, or contingent. A thing whose essence requires its existence is a necessity, a thing whose essence requires its nonexistence is an impossibility, and a thing whose essence requires neither its existence nor its nonexistence is a contingent.¹ That which is necessary does not have a cause, for if it had a cause, its existence would not be necessary with regard to its essence. A thing cannot be necessary both with regard to its essence and with regard to another thing, for if that were the case, the thing whose existence depends on another would be necessary by virtue of another.²

The essence of the contingent requires neither its existence nor its nonexistence. Neither of its two sides (i.e., neither existence nor nonexistence) has greater ontological suitability over the other. The contingent needs an external cause both for its existence and nonexistence. When considered with respect to its essence, the contingent is neither necessary nor impossible. When considered beyond this respect but together with the cause of its existence or nonexistence, the contingent becomes either necessary or impossible through another. This means that the contingent can be necessary by virtue of another if it exists and can be impossible by virtue of another if it does not exist. This is because the contingent's existence is impossible if a cause exists that necessitates its nonexistence. Likewise, the

1 Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, in *Kitābu'ş-Şifā*: Metafizik, trans. Ekrem Demirli and Ömer Türker (İstanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2013), I, 35-6.

2 *Ibid*, I, 35-6.

contingent's nonexistence is impossible if a cause exists that necessitates its existence. However, when the contingent is considered unconditionally and with regard only to what it is (i.e., without any accompanying cause or condition), its essence is neutral toward existence and nonexistence.³ Because the essence of the contingent requires neither its existence nor nonexistence, its existence or nonexistence by virtue of another does not imply any subversion (*inqilāb*) in its definition.⁴

In other words, the fact that something is contingent in essence contradicts neither its being necessary nor impossible by virtue of another. What is essentially contingent contradicts what is essentially necessary as well as what is essentially impossible.⁵ As a rule, the essentially necessary, the essentially impossible, and the essentially contingent cannot by definition transform into one another.

Three crucial assumptions are found regarding the contingent: (i) its neutrality toward existence and non-existence, (ii) its existence and nonexistence are by virtue of an external cause other than itself, and (iii) no subversion is present in its definition. Thanks to these principles, Ibn Sina was able to (a) posit the contingent as a premise in the argument from contingency, which underlines the role of the contingent in establishing the necessary existent against the agnostic views that consider God's existence indemonstrable; (b) rule out the autonomy of the contingent in making itself exist or not exist, which can be interpreted as a rebuttal of Democritean and other forms of atheism where the contingent has a preponderance for existence or non-existence without any external cause; and (c) show both the reliance of the contingent on the necessary throughout its existence and the continuity of the emanation of the necessary existent, which can be read as a rebuttal of both the deistic theories that view the God-world relationship as a *fait accompli* and the rational theologians' theory of the world's creation in time (*ḥudūth*). In all these conclusions, the premise that neither the existence nor non-existence side of the contingent can preponderate over the other plays a central role. Accordingly, studying the significance of the concepts of sufficient cause, ontological preponderance (*tarajjuh*), and ontological suitability (*awlawiyya*) and

3 For a detailed analysis of the contingent's neutrality toward existence and nonexistence, see Engin Erdem and Necmettin Pehlivan, "Varlığın ve Yokluğun Ötesi: Kemalpaşazâde'nin 'Leys ve Eys'in Anlamının İncelenmesine Dair Risâle'si", *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 27 (2012): 90-3.

4 Ibn Sinâ, *al-Ishârât wa-l-tanbihât ma'a sharḥ Naşîr al-Din al-Ṭûsî*, ed. Sulaymân Dunyâ (Cairo: Dâr al-Ma'ârif), III, 19; Shams al-Dîn al-Samarqandî, *al-Şaḥâ'if al-ilâhiyya*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥmân al-Sharîf (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Falâḥ, 1405), 123-4.

5 Ibn Sinâ, *Ishârât*, III, 19; Fakhr al-Din al-Râzî, *Sharḥ al-ishârât wa-l-tanbihât*, ed. 'Alî Riḍâ Najafzâda (Tehran: Anjumân-i Âsâr-u Mafâkhir-i Farhangî, 2005), 345.

exploring the debates and perspectives surrounding them are crucial for evaluating the argument from contingency. One can now proceed to investigate these issues from Samarqandī's perspective.

Samarqandī's Proof of the Principle of Sufficient Reason

Samarqandī discussed the principle of sufficient reason and ontological preponderance in his commentary on *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt Book IV Ch. 10*. In *al-Şahā'if al-İlāhiyya* and its commentary, *al-Ma'ārif fī sharḥ al-Şahā'if*, Samarqandī dealt with these subjects under the section titled "The Impossibility of the Preponderance of Either Side of the Contingent Without a Preponderating Cause."⁶ In these works, Samarqandī identifies three general positions on causality:

1.) Existence and nonexistence occur by coincidence: Samarqandī stated that only Democritus and his atomist followers, whom he described as a small group of natural philosophers, denied the principle of causality and claimed that everything occurred by coincidence.⁷ According to their view, preponderance in favor of existence or nonexistence occurs coincidentally.

2.) Only existence depends on a cause: Rational theologians believe that existence depends on a cause, but nonexistence does not, for when considered unconditionally, nonexistence lends itself to neither being a cause nor an effect. If cause and effect are positive (*thubūti*), then the nonexistence that carries them should also be positive; if they are privative (*'adamī*), then the cause of nonexistence will also be privative; but nonexistence in the absolute sense cannot be a cause. However, some rational theologians accept that conditional nonexistence can serve as a cause or effect, as in the case of the absence of money being the cause of poverty.⁸

6 Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, *Bishārāt al-ishārāt fī sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-al-tanbihāt*, ed. Ali Ojabi (Tehran: Muassasa-i Pajūhash-i Mirās-i Maktūb, 1399), II-III, 194; Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 152-55; Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif fī sharḥ al-Şahā'if*, in *Kitāb al-ma'ārif fī sharḥ al-Şahā'if ta'lif shams al-dīn muḥammad b. ashraf al-samarqandī taḥqīq wa-l-dirāsa*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Sulaymān Abū Suailiq (Amman: Jāmi'at al-'ulūm al-islāmiyya al-'ālamīyya, 2012), 166-8; the term *murajjih* in the premise "neither of the two extremities of the contingent preponderates without a preponderating cause (*murajjih*)" indicates complete cause and sufficient reason. The term translated here as "preponderance" describes either the existence of the essentially contingent at the limit of necessity or its nonexistence at the limit of impossibility by virtue of an external cause.

7 Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 152; *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 166.

8 Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 152; *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 150, 166; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal* in *Ana Meseleleriyle Kelām ve Felsefe: el-Muḥassal*, trans. Eşref Altaş (İstanbul: Klasik, 2019), 122; Naşir al-Dīn al-Tūsī, *Talkhiş al-Muḥaṣṣal aw naqd al-Muḥaṣṣal*, ed. M. Bidārfar (Qom: Maktabat al-Bidār, 1440), 445-6.

3.) Both existence and nonexistence have a cause: The premise of the argument from contingency is often expressed as the contingent must have a preponderating cause or as preponderance without a preponderating cause is impossible (*imtinā' al-tarajjuh bi-lā murajjih*). Hence, Ibn Sinā and his followers claim that both the existence and nonexistence of the contingent must rely on a cause. Because the existence of what is essentially necessary and the nonexistence of what is essentially impossible are by definition necessary, they need neither an external cause nor preponderance by virtue of an external cause.⁹

There are two perspectives on the origin of this principle of sufficient reason as embedded in Ibn Sinā's argument from contingency. Scholars have observed that its major premise (i.e., preponderance without a preponderating cause is impossible) is either self-evident (*badīhī*) or must be proven using an argument (*istidlālī*).¹⁰

The first and more widely accepted approach considers the principle of sufficient reason self-evident. It is embedded in the nature of all human beings, intelligent and insane, child and adult, and even of other living creatures.¹¹ Based on this view, the following objection can be made: The proposition of preponderance without a preponderating cause being impossible does not have the same self-evidence as the proposition of one is half of two, whose self-evidence is quite obvious. This suggests that some level of contradiction might be involved in the first proposition due to the inability of saying that it has perfect certainty and self-evidence.¹² Following Ṭūsī, Samarqandī stated that, while different degrees of self-evidence and levels of clarity and obscurity can exist, these are only applicable to conceptions (*taṣawwur*), not to judgments.¹³

According to the second perspective, the principle of sufficient reason needs to be proven. Samarqandī transmitted three arguments in support of this:

(i) The first argument is found in the following passage in *al-Ishārāt Book IV Ch. 10*, where Ibn Sinā claimed that the cause of the contingent's existence or nonexistence must be an external thing:

9 Ibn Sinā, *Ishārāt*, III, 96-7; Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal* 66; Ṭūsī, *Talkhiṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 237.

10 Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 66; Rāzī said that Ibn Sinā held this view based on *Ishārāt V. 10*. Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt*, II, 417. In *al-Maṭālib*, he stated Ibn Sinā had attempted a proof, did not succeed, and asserted self-evidence once he realized he had failed. Rāzī said Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī had also been an advocate of proof. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya min al-'ilm al-ilāhī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabi, 1987), 87.

11 Ibn Sinā, *Ishārāt*, III, 96-7; Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 153-54; Thomas Reid similarly defended the idea of self-evidence with reference to common sense. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Cambridge: John Bartlett, 1852), 407-9.

12 Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 66; Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 154.

13 Ṭūsī, *Talkhiṣ al-muḥaṣṣal*, 244; Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 154

The thing whose essence is contingency does not exist by [virtue of] its essence. With respect to its being contingent, its existence is not more preponderant than its nonexistence by virtue of its essence. If one option becomes more preponderant than the other, this is due to the presence or absence of a certain thing [i.e., a cause]. It follows that the existence of every contingent is through another.¹⁴

In the *Ilāhiyyāt* section of *al-Shifā'*, Ibn Sīnā gives a more detailed proof of the principle of sufficient reason using the modalities of existence. According to this proof, the contingent has a cause because when it comes into existence, it becomes separated from nonexistence, and when it ceases to exist, it becomes separated from existence. The cause of its separation is either (a) another thing, in which case that thing is the cause, or (b) the contingent's quiddity (*māhiyya*). (i) If its quiddity is sufficient for its existence or nonexistence, then its existence or nonexistence is necessary. But the contingent has been assumed to not be necessary, which is a contradiction. (ii) If its quiddity is insufficient, then it derives its existence or nonexistence from another thing, in which case that other thing is the cause. Therefore, the sides of the contingent have a cause. Either existence or nonexistence becomes necessary not by virtue of the contingent's essence but by virtue of an external cause.¹⁵

According to Rāzī and Samarqandī, Ibn Sīnā had committed the fallacy of *petitio principii* (*muşādara 'alā al-maṭlūb*). Rāzī stated that the premise that is based on the contingent's essence is but a reiteration of the definition of the contingent. He also made the further objection that rational division (*taqsim 'aqli*) in the argument is incomplete. Namely, the division in the major premise of the disjunctive conditional stating "a contingent's preponderance is either by itself or by another thing; it is not by itself; therefore, it is by another thing," is not exhaustive, since the third possibility of "or neither by itself nor by another thing" has been omitted.¹⁶ On the other hand, Samarqandī confined himself to merely describing Ibn Sīnā's argument

14 Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, III, 20.

15 Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 36-7; For a detailed description of this argument and Ibn Sīnā's perspective on the principle of sufficient reason, see Kara Richardson, "Avicenna and the Principle of Sufficient Reason", *The Review of Metaphysics* 67, no. 4 (2014): 743-68.

16 Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt*, II, 343-4; Rāzī thought that Ibn Sīnā had not addressed this possibility as it is clearly mistaken. Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-āliya*, I, 77-90. Isfahānī thought the claim of the disjunction being non-exhaustive to be incoherent. Engin Erdem, "Tecrid Geleneğinde Zorunlu Varlık'ın Zorunluluğu Tartışması: İsfahānī, Kuşçu ve Devvānī", *Beytulhikme: An International Journal of Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (2021): 663.

in *al-Bishārāt*,¹⁷ whereas in *al-Şahā'if* and its commentary, he stated that Ibn Sīnā's solution to the problem had been precisely the point at issue; namely, whether a quiddity that cannot by itself specify for itself either of the two sides needs a preponderating cause to do this. Hence, in line with the issue Rāzī had raised, someone could object by saying, "The contingent cannot be argued to be in need of another thing if it is not sufficient for its existence and nonexistence, due to a third option having been excluded from the division."¹⁸

(ii) The second argument advanced to prove the principle is from Rāzī. According to this argument, the contingent cannot exist unless it is necessary. Because it comes into existence after having been nonexistent, necessity is a real (*wujūdi*) attribute, and to have such an attribute requires a substrate. Because it does not exist prior to necessity, however, the contingent cannot be a substrate. Thus, the bearer of the attribute of necessity that is linked to the contingent's existence is the effector (*mu'aththir*) that is linked to that contingent.¹⁹ Samarqandī identified four problems in this argument: First, Rāzī's claim that necessity must be a real property since it exists when it is not can be proven false by the counterexample of blindness, which exists when something is not yet is not a real property. Necessity is therefore a mental (*i'tibārī*) property due to such properties also being able to attach to nonexistent quiddities. Secondly, even if the attribute in question were considered real, the bearing of a quality that belongs to the contingent through its effector would go against the subject-attribute relationship. Thirdly, Rāzī stated that the necessity that would be attached to the contingent is borne by the effector, whereas the effector's property in relation to the contingent is not necessity or being necessary (*wujūb*), but necessitation (*ijāb*).²⁰ Fourthly, the flaw in Rāzī's reasoning becomes evident when it is applied to the nonexistence side of the contingent: If one were to say "It became nonexistent when it existed" regarding the contingent, then one could also say based on this reasoning that the necessity of nonexistence is attached to and carried by the contingent during its nonexistence, which is absurd.²¹

17 Samarqandī, *Bishārāt al-ishārāt*, II-III, 193-4.

18 Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 152; *Kitāb al-ma'arīf*, 167.

19 Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 68-69; *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya*, I, 90.

20 Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 153; *Kitāb al-ma'arīf*, 167; The first to draw attention to the difference between necessity (*wujūb*) and necessitation (*ijāb*) was Ṭūsī. Ṭūsī, *Talkhiṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 244.

21 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'arīf*, 167. Samarqandī stated this argument to be valid for the rational theologians who assert that only the existence side of the contingent needs a cause.

(iii) Samarqandī himself proved the principle of sufficient reason in the following way: If one side of the contingent occurred without a cause, then that side either (a) did not preponderate over the other or (b) it did. Both alternatives are impossible. The fallacy of the first alternative (a) regarding non-preponderance is evident due to the fact that the contingent would not have occurred if it did not preponderate. The occurrence of one side indicates the preponderance of that side. The other alternative (b) where preponderance has no cause is also impossible. This is because, if preponderance is present in the contingent, this occurred either (i) through the addition of something that did not exist within it before or (ii) without any such addition. For (ii) preponderance to take place without the addition of anything is impossible, and for (i) where something was added, the existence of that added thing is either preponderant over its nonexistence or not preponderant. If it is not preponderant, then it cannot occur as mentioned above, and this sets off an infinite regress. If it is preponderant, then this preponderance occurred either through the addition of something or did not occur this way, which again leads to an infinite regress due to any reasoning being undertaken from this point on would be a repetition of what occurred in (i). Therefore, the supposition that one side of the contingent can occur without a cause is false because it leads to either a contradiction or an infinite regress.²² In summary, the preponderance of a contingent thing that is either in favor of existence or nonexistence is always linked to a cause, which means that the preponderant side is always necessary or impossible through another. Samarqandī's proof can be outlined as follows:

22 Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 154; Kitāb al-ma'ārif, 168.

If one side of the contingent occurs without a cause

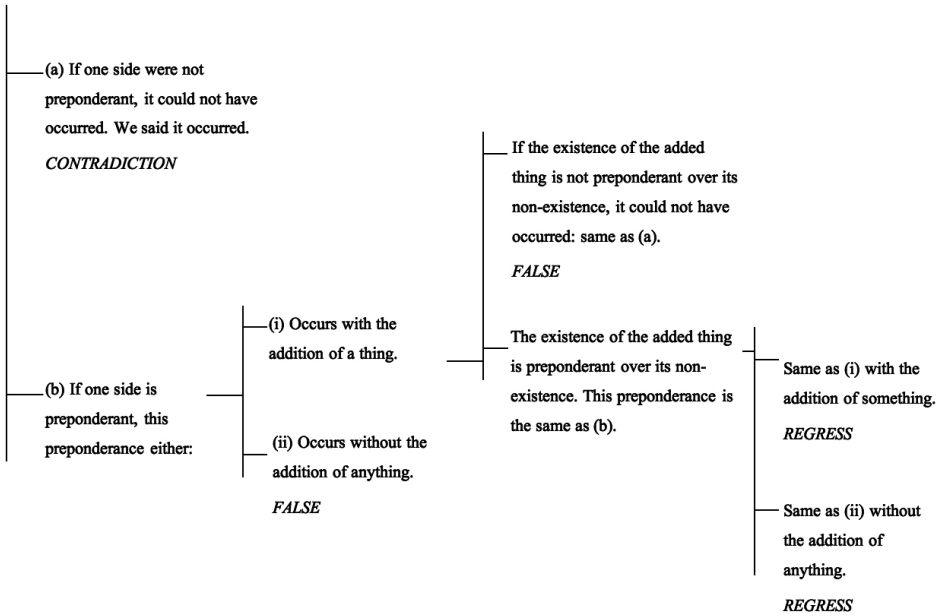


Diagram 1. Proof of the principle of sufficient reason

One could argue that Samarqandi’s proof resembles Archimedes’ first proposition in *On the Equilibrium of Planes* inasmuch as both are based on preponderance. Archimedes stated therein that equal weights at equal distances are in equilibrium and adding weight to one side or subtracting from the other results in preponderance.²³ In fact, when Leibniz tried to prove the principle of sufficient reason, he appealed to this Archimedean proposition, saying that preponderance does not occur when equal weights are placed at equal distances on both arms of a scale with arms of equal length.²⁴ A similar example can be found in what Aristotle quoted from Anaximander and other natural philosophers. In their view, the Earth is fixed and immovable because no reason exists for it to go up, down, right, or left, which is an inference based on the assumption that everything must have a cause.²⁵

23 Archimedes, “On the Equilibrium of Planes or Centres of Gravity of Planes. Book I”, in *The Works of Archimedes*, ed. T. L. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), 189.
 24 G. W. Leibniz, “Primary Truths”, in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 31.
 25 Richardson, “Avicenna and the Principle of Sufficient Reason,” 748-9.

Ontological Preponderance, Necessity, and Contingency

Can one conceive of a contingent that does not reach the limit of necessity (*ḥadd al-wujūb*) and remains at the limit of contingency notwithstanding preponderance and complete cause, but occurs nonetheless? To answer this question, attention can be turned to what Ibn Sinā stated in *al-Ishārāt Book V Ch. 10*:

The preponderance of one side of the contingency of anything that did not exist and existed afterwards over the other side by virtue of a thing or cause is evident to the intellect even though it may be possible for the intellect not to pay attention to this evidence and to resort to other kinds of explanation... This preponderance and determination by virtue of that thing [and cause] either occurs after having been necessitated by the cause, or it is not necessitated and remains in the realm of contingency. Thus, we once again begin to look for the cause of preponderance, and with no end [which leads to a regress]. Therefore, the truth is that it is necessary by a cause.

A number of key issues are found in this passage: One is the inability of either side of the contingent to preponderate over the other without a complete cause. Another is the occurrence of the effect when a complete cause exists. A third issue is the necessity of this occurrence.²⁶ After describing these issues in some detail, Rāzī launched the following discussion: Suppose that the contingent needed a cause because it is neutral toward existence and nonexistence. After the cause came into existence, the side of existence preponderated, but this preponderance still did not reach the limit of necessity. Owing to this preponderance, the contingent did not need another cause and came into existence while still in the realm of contingency (*fi ḥadd al-imkān*) without having reached the limit of necessity.²⁷ The issue here is whether or not the contingent will in fact occur within the limits of contingency without reaching the limit of necessity upon adding the cause.

According to Rāzī, the assertion of occurrence within the limits of contingency when preponderance is present is false. If the effect cannot possibly proceed from the cause when preponderance is present, then the procession of the effect from the cause is necessary. If it is not necessary, then procession and its absence remain contingent in spite of preponderance. Thus, sometimes coming into existence occurs, and sometimes remaining in non-existence occurs. Ascribing one of the times when preponderance occurs to the occurrence of the effect when owing to a

26 For other discussions about cause and effect, see Maḥmūd b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iṣfahānī, *Tasdiq al-qawā'id fi sharḥ Tajrīd*, ed. Eşref Altaş, (Ankara - İstanbul: ISAM, 2020), II, 353-423.

27 Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt*, II, 418.

new cause means that the first preponderance was insufficient for existence, which would mean that it was a quasi-preponderance. If no cause is present, ascribing one of the two times to the effect's occurrence implies the preponderance of one of two equal sides over the other without a preponderator, which is impossible. Therefore, the claim of occurrence in the realm of contingency despite the existence of preponderance is false, and every contingent that departs from the limit of neutrality by virtue of a cause is necessary when it exists and impossible when it does not exist. Consequently, if something is preponderant, it does not exist or cease to exist while remaining within the limits of contingency. If preponderance exists, it occurs *necessarily*.²⁸ According to a rule originating with Aristotle²⁹ and embraced by Ibn Sīnā, what is, is when it is through necessity, just as what is not is not when it is not through necessity. In other words, everything that exists occurs through necessity; likewise, everything that does not exist does not occur through necessity. In summary, in order to occur, the essentially contingent should reach the limit of necessity through a cause that is added to it, while in order to not occur, the essentially contingent should reach the limit of impossibility through a cause that is added to it.³⁰

Ṭūsī drew attention to the theological aspects of this discussion. From this perspective, the effect necessarily proceeds from the First Cause along with preponderance. The First Cause is necessary not only by virtue of its essence but also with respect to its being a cause. Hence, the discussion about preponderance here is not about the principle of causality but instead about whether existence proceeds from the existing cause by way of necessity (*‘alā sabīl al-wujūb*) or by way of possibility (*‘alā sabīl al-ṣiḥḥa*).³¹ On the other hand, Samarqandī stated that commentators had been confused in their explanations about the issue and that the passage in *al-Ishārāt* was essentially a recapitulation of the general account presented in the book.³²

Because the issue also pertains to the pre-eternity of the world due with respect to God being a complete cause, Samarqandī focused on the distinction between preponderance (*tarajjuh*, *rujḥān*) and preference (*tarjīh*) at the moment of the existence

28 *Ibid*, 418-19.

29 Aristoteles, *Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans. J. L. Ackrill (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), par. 19a 28-32.

30 Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 66.

31 Ṭūsī, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt ma‘a sharḥ Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī*, III, 96-7; Samarqandī, *Bishārāt al-ishārāt* II-III, 236.

32 Samarqandī, *Bishārāt al-ishārāt*, II-III, 236.

of the complete cause, stating that scholars had omitted this distinction from their discussions. According to Samarqandī, these terms mean two different things:

(a) Complete cause or sufficient reason: This meaning is expressed in the statement of preponderance without a preponderating cause is impossible. Accordingly, a contingent thing cannot exist unless a cause, an agent, or an originator is present. Samarqandī succinctly described this principle using the Arabic phrase *imtinā 'al-tarajjuh bi-lā murajjih*. This is the meaning that conveys the need for sufficient reason across all schools of Islamic thought regardless of whether they consider the creator a necessitating (*mūjib*) or volitional (*mukhtār*) agent.³³

(b) Will and grounds for preference (*tarjih*): This meaning is about whether the creator can prefer to act or to not act based on whether He is a necessitating or volitional agent, as well as whether He can prefer the preponderant side without a cause, motive, or benefit. Two perspectives are found on this issue in the history of Islamic thought: (i) Based on their view of the creator as a necessitating agent, the philosophical tradition maintains preponderance without a preponderating cause to be false. Because the emanation of God is universal and things stand in equal relation to Him, emanation does not become oriented to a particular matter without a cause. Thus, for the necessitating agent to influence a thing, its emanation must be determined by virtue of a preponderating factor. For instance, when a fire is lit around objects, it affects dry objects, not wet ones; similarly, the Sun illuminates only the objects it encounters.³⁴ (ii) On the other hand, if the creator is a volitional agent, on the other hand, then He prefers one side over the other without a cause or preponderating cause (*bi-lā murajjih*). For instance, when two loaves of bread with equal qualities and conditions are placed in front of a hungry person, the person necessarily prefers one and does so without a cause. According to Samarqandī, what will means is the ability to choose any alternative regardless of whether it is preponderant, neutral, or preponderated over. Thus, someone with free will is able to choose between two unequal loaves the one with lower quality. Likewise, God the Most High can choose either of two equal things or the worse of two alternatives over the better without having any reason.³⁵

33 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 168; 'Ubayd Allāh b. Mas'ūd Ṣadr al-Sharī'a, *al-Tawḍīḥ 'alā al-Tanqīḥ* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya), 183, 185.

34 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 168.

35 *Ibid.* Some points of divergence can be found between Samarqandī's views and those from the schools of rational theology arguing God to be a volitional agent (*mukhtār*). For example, the Mu'tazilis defend the doctrine of the best (*aṣlah*) and assert that the preponderance of the volitional agent must depend on a preponderating cause, where preponderance without such a cause (*tarjih bi-lā murajjih*) is impossible. Mir Zāhid b. Muḥammad al-Harawī, *al-Ḥāshiyā li-Mir Zāhid 'alā sharḥ al-mawāqif* (Laknaw, 1293), 87.

Table 1.
Views regarding the contingent's neutrality and preponderance

Object	Cause	Relevant side	Conclusion	Occurrence	Adherent
Contingent	Without an external cause	Existence	By coincidence	Occurs	Democritus
Essentially contingent	Without an external cause	Existence and nonexistence	Neutral	Remains in contingency	Ibn Sinā
Contingent	Through an external cause	Existence or nonexistence	Preponderant / By way of necessity	Occurs	Ibn Sinā
Contingent	Through an external cause	Existence or nonexistence	Preponderant / By way of possibility	Occurs	Rāzī discussed this in <i>Sharḥ</i> and attributed it to rational theologians
Contingent	Through an external cause	Existence only (Because nonexistence can be neither a cause nor effect)	Preponderant	Occurs	Rational theologians

Whether or not the contingent relies on a complete cause for existence and nonexistence and whether it occurs necessarily or remains in the realm of contingency when a complete cause exists are important issues. In both cases, the contingent's occurrence indicates the existence of ontological preponderance. An equally important and interesting issue is the conception of the contingent as having left the state of neutrality and not reached the limits of necessity and impossibility. The article will now shift focus to this issue.

Şadr al-Sharī'a, an important representative of the Māturīdī tradition, claims the preponderance of the volitional agent to have a cause, the preponderant side to not be an object of volition, and the agent's choosing between two equal alternatives or his choosing the non-preponderant (*marjūh*) to be possible (*jā'iz*) and to occur (*wāqī'*). Şadr al-Sharī'a, *al-Tawḍīḥ 'alā al-Tanqīh*, 184. The Ash'aris maintain the preponderance of the volitional agent to not require a cause. Because they reject the doctrine of the best, they maintain preponderance without a preponderating cause to be possible and to occur, and their examples are the same as those given by Samarqandi, as cited above. Harawī, *al-Ḥaṣhiya li-Mīr Zāhid*, 87.

Ontological Suitability and Its Different Types

In the preceding two sections, an ontological preponderance for one of the two extremes was shown to occur in the presence of a complete cause and this preponderance to render one side of the contingent necessary and the other impossible. This section will discuss the concept of ontological suitability (*awlawiyya*).³⁶ I should clarify beforehand that ontological suitability is distinct from ontological preponderance. While ontological preponderance indicates necessary occurrence or the absence thereof, ontological suitability indicates the greater appropriateness of the contingent for existence or nonexistence in the realm of contingency, either essentially or by virtue of a cause. As expressed in the definition of contingency, the essentially contingent is neutral toward necessity and impossibility (i.e., toward existence and nonexistence). Now with regard to ontological suitability, I ask the following question: Can one conceive of an existent that leaves the state of neutrality expressed in the contingent's definition but does not reach the limit of necessity or impossibility either by virtue of itself, through an external cause, or with no cause at all? If yes, then two gray areas need to be recognized outside of the extremities of necessity and impossibility: one for the ontological suitability for nonexistence between the contingent and the impossible, and another for the ontological suitability for existence between the contingent and the necessary. In this framework, the existence of a thing occurs in the gray area between the contingent and necessity, while its nonexistence occurs in the gray area between the contingent and impossibility. Thus, one could include the suitability for nonexistence and the suitability for existence in the ontological modalities alongside necessity, contingency, and impossibility. In this view of modalities, the contingent whose existence intensifies is more suitable for existence and continues to come into existence without ever reaching the limit of necessity, either by its own essence, through a cause, or without a cause. Similarly, the contingent whose existence moves toward extinction is more suitable for nonexistence and is involved in a process of nonexistence where it proceeds toward extinction without ever reaching the limit of impossibility, again either by itself, through a cause, or without a cause. In short, according to the theory of ontological suitability, moving toward existence generates a further increase in that direction, while moving toward nonexistence generates a further decrease,

36 The terms preponderance (*rujhāniyya*) and suitability (*awlawiyya*) are sometimes used interchangeably in the works of Ibn Sīnā and his later followers. I have taken special care here to use the terms distinctly in accordance with their different meanings.

either essentially, through a cause, or with no cause at all. Hence, one can describe ontological suitability as “a determination that precludes contradiction and occurs in intermediate degrees between the state of neutrality and the extremities.”³⁷

Based on the sides of existence and nonexistence and whether or not preponderance and causality are involved, three types of ontological suitability can be identified as follows:

Ontological Suitability Type-A (OSA): In OSA, either owing to its nature or in the absence of a cause, the existence of the contingent occurs without reaching the limit of necessity, and its nonexistence occurs without reaching the limit of impossibility. A proponent of this kind of ontological suitability can give the following example: As philosophers have maintained, some contingents occur frequently, others occur rarely, and others do and do not occur with equal frequency. For the contingent that occurs frequently, existence is suitable, though its nonexistence is not impossible. For instance, the nature of the element earth ensures its being at the center of the Earth for the most part, though one can rarely prevent it from being at the center by forcefully throwing it upward. Similarly, human beings have five fingers on their hands, but rarely some people have more. For the contingent that rarely occurs, nonexistence is suitable, though its existence is not impossible. For example, six-fingered-ness in humans is suitable for nonexistence, although its existence is not impossible.³⁸

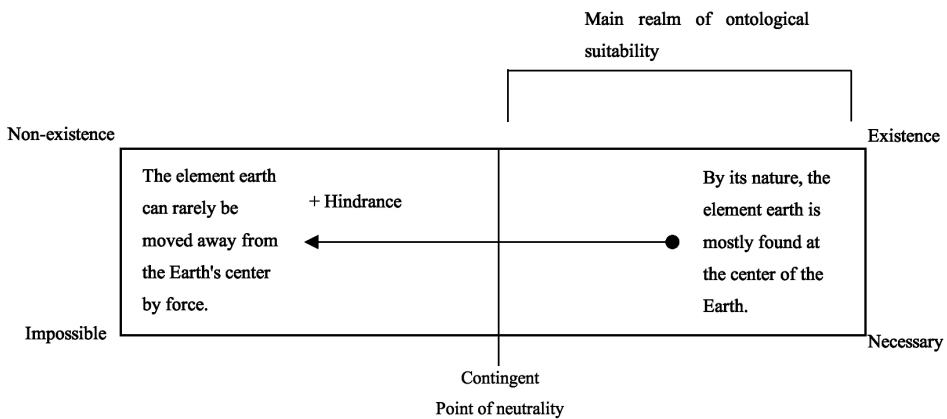


Diagram 2. *Ontological suitability for existence not reaching the limit of necessity*

37 Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī ‘ilm uṣūl al-fīqh*, ed. Ṭāha al-‘Alwāni (Beirut: Mu’assassat al-Risāla, 1992), VI, 118.

38 Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*, I, 91; Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-‘uqūl fī dirāyat al-uṣūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Dhakhā ‘ir, 2015), 427-8; *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya fī ‘ilm al-ilāhiyyāt wa-l-ṭabi ‘iyyāt* (Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabi, 1990), 222-3.

A contingent with OSA displays four features: (i) It is characterized by contingency due to being able to carry existence or nonexistence. (ii) It falls within a gray area where it has departed from the limit of contingency but not reached the limit of impossibility. (iii) It is ontologically suitable (*awlā*) for existence or nonexistence by its essence or without a cause. (iv) The existence or nonexistence that arises out of suitability does not need an external cause or effector.

There are two main problems with OSA. The first is the problem of whether or not to accept the impossibility of a third state. OSA presupposes a gradated realm lying outside the neutral limit of the contingent but not reaching the limits of necessity and impossibility. Thus, it is incompatible with any metaphysical position that upholds the principle of non-contradiction, according to which existence always conforms to one of the two ends of contradiction, and something either is or is not. The second problem is the rejection of the principle of causality and the question of whether existence can take place without a cause. This is because OSA allows the contingent to preponderate toward existence or nonexistence without a preponderating cause. Thus, OSA replaces the notion of causality in existence with coincidence, thereby invalidating the notions of need and agency, namely the contingent's need for a cause, which also underlies arguments for God's existence. Accordingly, one could characterize the concept of ontological suitability as part of an atheist criticism directed against proofs of God's existence, especially the argument from contingency.³⁹ Hence, from Rāzī's point of view, defending the existence of an ontological suitability such as OSA is tantamount to defending theories that eliminate the need for an efficient cause and creative agent by claiming that the contingent's quiddity is sufficient for its existence and nonexistence. Consequently, in order for the argument from contingency to remain strong and intact, this kind of suitability must be rejected.⁴⁰

Ontological Suitability Type-B (OSB): In OSB, the contingent exists or does not exist necessarily and by virtue of a cause, while the side that does not occur has greater suitability than the side that does. Hence, this kind of ontological suitability does not pertain to the side to which the cause is added but rather to its opposite.

The main issue in OSB is whether the contingent can be suitable for one side and incline toward the opposite side even though it exists or does not exist

39 Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya*, I, 122-4.

40 *Ibid*, 124; For Rāzī's criticisms of suitability, see *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya*, I, 91; *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya*, I, 223-4.

necessarily and by virtue of a cause. Here, the contingent has an inclination in the direction opposite to that dictated by the cause: It either comes into existence by a cause but has an inclination toward nonexistence, or it ceases to exist owing to a cause but has an inclination toward existence.

A contingent with OSB exhibits four features: (i) It is characterized by contingency due to being able to carry existence or nonexistence. (ii) In the case of its existence due to a cause, it reaches the limit of necessity, and in the case of its nonexistence due to a cause, it reaches the limit of impossibility. (iii) The ontological suitability that it essentially has generates an inclination opposite to the side dictated by its cause.

A proponent of OSB will often cite accidents as examples of the existence side. Following a view also adopted by Ibn Sinā,⁴¹ accidents can be stronger or weaker than one another.⁴² For instance, essentially unstable (*ghayr qārr al-dhāt*) and flowing (*sayyāl*) accidents such as time and sound proceed into the realm of existence necessarily and by virtue of another thing, but they have an ontological suitability for nonexistence on account of their essences. As a result, they cannot remain in a state of persistence (*baqā'*) and tend toward extinction. If they were not essentially suitable for nonexistence, their persistence would be necessary.⁴³ Rational theologians assert the nonexistence side of this kind of suitability in particular to be valid for all contingents because existence according to them occurs by virtue of a cause, whereas nonexistence does not. Because the contingent with respect to its essence is a substrate (*maḥall*) of nonexistence, every contingent is essentially inclined toward nonexistence.⁴⁴

41 Ibn Sinā, *ʿUyūn al-ḥikma* (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbūʿāt; Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1980), 54-5.

42 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ ʿuyūn al-ḥikma* (Tehran: Muʿassasat al-Ṣādiq, 1373), 82.

43 Rāzī, *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya*, I, 222; *al-Maṭālib al-ʿaliya*, I, 122-23.

44 Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥāʾif*, 152; *Kitāb al-maʿārif*, 150, 166; Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 122; Ṭūsī, *Talkhiṣ al-muḥaṣṣal*, 445-6.

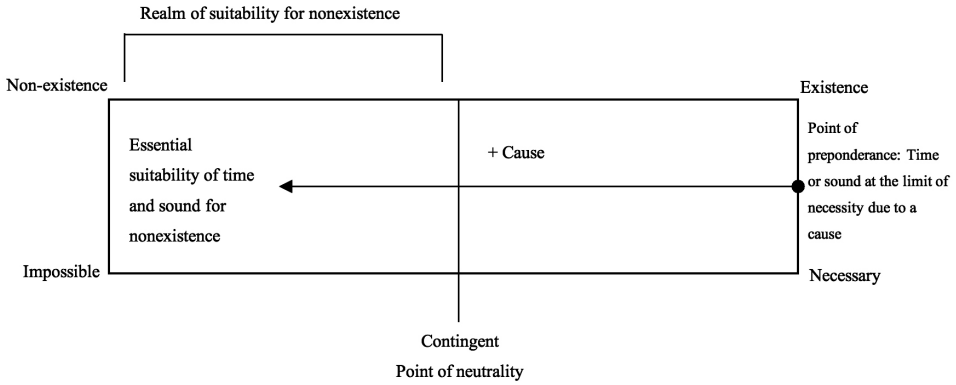


Diagram 3. Essential ontological suitability for nonexistence against preponderance by a cause

OSB is a type of suitability where the contingent needs a preponderating cause and preponderates either in the direction of existence or nonexistence. For this reason and unlike OSA, it is not based on absolute causelessness. While rational theologians can accept the causeless inclination toward nonexistence of things that have come into existence, Ibn Sīnā insisted that nonexistence must have a cause. According to Ibn Sīnā’s above-mentioned definition of contingent, the contingent’s nonexistence must depend on a cause, and it cannot be said to occur either by virtue of its essence or on account of its quiddity. However, defending OSB is tantamount to saying that quiddity is sufficient for the nonexistence of the contingent and that nonexistence needs no effector. Hence, in order for the argument from contingency, which is based on this definition of contingency, to remain valid and effective, this type of ontological suitability must also be rejected.⁴⁵

Ontological Suitability Type-C (OSC): In OSC, the contingent leaves the limit of contingency by virtue of a cause and exists or does not exist in the gray area without reaching the limits of necessity or impossibility. This type of suitability involves causality. The effector brings the effect into existence conditionally and in spite of hindrances. Due to the presence of causes on the opposite side, the influence of the cause fails to bring its action to the limit of necessity and thus falls short of necessary causality. For instance, given no impediments, weight causes an object to fall. Hence, weight is the cause of

45 Rāzi, *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*, I, 124; For Rāzi’s criticisms of suitability, see *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*, I, 91, 126-29; *al-Mabāhith al-mashriqiyya*, I, 223-24.

the fall's existence on the condition that no hindrance is present. Yet, due to a hindrance still being able to interrupt a fall at any point during its unfolding, the fall occurs with ontological suitability without ever reaching the limit of necessity.⁴⁶

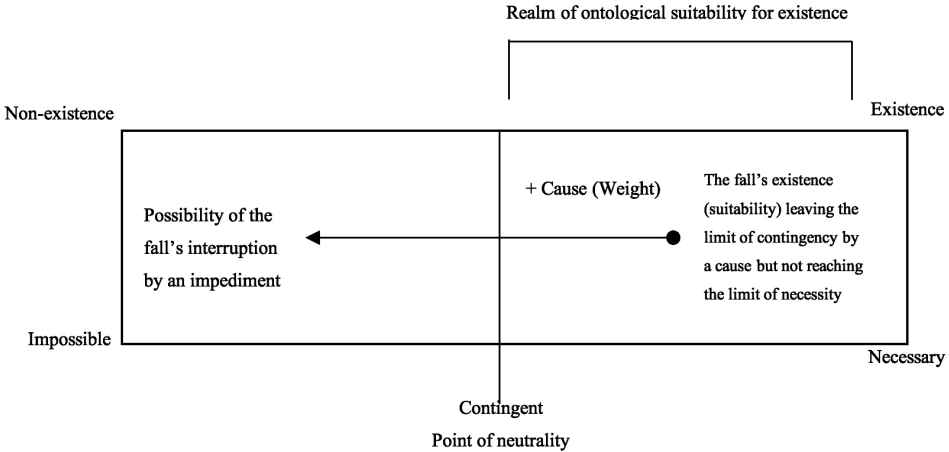


Diagram 4. Occurrence between the contingent and necessity through the addition of a cause

Although OSC is free of the problems accompanying causelessness, doing away with the necessary link between cause and effect leads to the problem often described in Islamic thought as the effect's disaccompaniment of the cause. According to Ibn Sinā, the effect is necessary at the moment of the existence of the complete cause. Moreover, OSC also runs contrary to the conjunction and continuity of cause and effect due to how the effect's disaccompaniment of the cause not only prevents the latter from being a real cause, but also due to how it leads to an infinite regress resulting from the absence of the effect when sufficient reason is present.⁴⁷

Having discussed the different kinds of ontological suitability and their bases, the article will now take a closer look at the various views, arguments, and counterarguments that have been voiced regarding ontological suitability in the history of Islamic thought.

46 Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya*, I, 123; *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl*, I, 427-8.

47 Iṣfahānī, *Tasdid al-qawāʿid*, II, 357-61.

Views on Ontological Preponderance and Suitability

Scholars have conceptualized ontological preponderance and ontological suitability in different ways. Following Samarqandī's classification, I will now present their different positions, supporting arguments, and counterarguments they have advanced against them.

(1) Those who deny that the contingent is essentially preponderant toward or ontologically suitable for either existence or nonexistence:⁴⁸

According to this view, to which Ibn Sīnā and the majority of scholars adhere,⁴⁹ neither of the two extremities with respect to the contingent can by itself be preponderant over or more suitable than the other. Whether ontological suitability is sufficient for the occurrence of its relevant extremity or insufficient and remaining in the realm of contingency makes no difference here.⁵⁰ Samarqandī stated this view to be favored by the majority of scholars and described the supporting argument as follows:

Suppose that by virtue of its essence the contingent has one of its two sides, namely B, preponderate over its other side, namely A. Then, when side A has a cause, (i) if the preponderance of side B does not continue, the preponderance of B cannot be due to the essence of the contingent. If (ii) If the preponderance of side B continues, it is no longer a real cause because A, to which a cause was added, is unable to preponderate. This is because a real cause provides preponderance, as mentioned above. (iii) If side A becomes preponderant by virtue of the cause, then both sides become preponderant. In this case, while the preponderance of B is by virtue of the essence of the contingent, the preponderance of A is through a cause external to the contingent. What occurs by virtue of essence is stronger than what occurs by virtue of another. If A is realized because it has a cause, then what occurs by virtue of another would be more preponderant. But what occurs by virtue of essence is said to be stronger than what occurs by another. If side A is not realized despite the existence of its cause, then the cause would no longer be a real cause, which is a contradiction.⁵¹

According to Samarqandī, this argument is open to objection because the preponderance of A can reach the limit of necessity despite occurring through

48 Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 155

49 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 168.

50 Kemālpāşāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq anna-l-mumkin lā yakūn aḥad al-ṭarafayn ayy al-wujūd wa-l-'adam awlā bihi bi-dhātīhi* (MS: The National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, n.d.), fol. 244b.

51 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 169.

another, and B can have an ontological suitability that does not reach the limit of necessity despite occurring by virtue of its essence. If the suitability arising from the contingent itself were to reach the limit of necessity, the contingent would not remain contingent but become necessary, which is impossible. Therefore, suitability by virtue of another can preponderate over suitability by virtue of essence. For instance, the forced inclination of the stone thrown upward preponderates over its natural inclination by virtue of its essence. Here, forced inclination and natural inclination correspond respectively to preponderance and Type-B ontological suitability (OSB). Also, because natural inclination does not render its opposite impossible, nothing is present there that goes against the definition of the contingent.⁵²

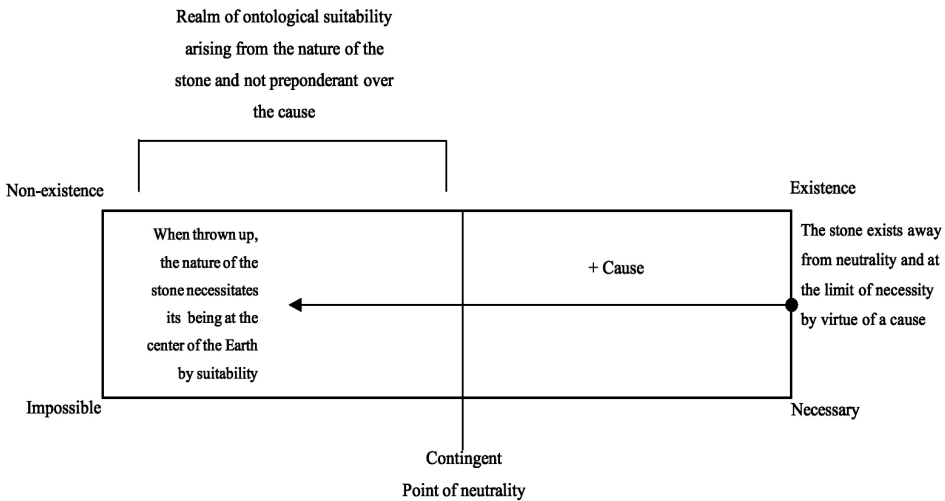


Diagram 5. Samarqandi’s counterexample against those who reject ontological suitability unconditionally

(2) Those who affirm that the contingent is preponderant toward or ontologically suitable for either existence or nonexistence:⁵³

Depending on what they consider the object of preponderance or suitability, the adherents of this view can be classified as follows:

52 *Ibid.*

53 Samarqandi, *al-Ṣaḥā’if*, 155; Kemāl-pāzāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 243b.

(2a) The contingent is preponderant for nonexistence by virtue of its essence.⁵⁴ Rational theologians who defend this view offer two supporting arguments, one of which is as follows: If nothing has caused a contingent, it is necessarily nonexistent, and in order for it to exist, its complete cause must be present. This shows that nonexistence is essentially preponderant. Someone might object to this, saying they deny that nonexistence will occur if nothing causes a contingent. In response, one could reply that existence should occur when nonexistence does not,⁵⁵ because according to the principle of non-contradiction, something either exists or does not exist, with no third position present in between the two.⁵⁶ Hence, if nothing causes a contingent, nonexistence is preponderant by virtue of the contingent's essence.

Samarqandī made three replies against this argument: First, the nonexistence of the contingent that occurs by virtue of its essence would violate the principle of sufficient reason (*imtinā' al-tarajjuh bi-lā murajjih*) because the contingent's nonexistence would also have to have a cause. Secondly, one might argue that the preponderance of nonexistence is due to nonexistence, not to the essence of the contingent. This is because the contingent that occurs by virtue of its essence would necessitate its nonexistence by its essence and in the absence of an external cause, which would render it impossible, whereas such a subversion (*inqilāb*) of modalities cannot happen, as that would violate the accepted definition of contingency. Thirdly, even though its proponents consider preponderance without a preponderating cause impossible, this argument requires nonexistence to be independent of a preponderator. As a counter-objection to this objection, one might say that the claimant has accepted a preponderator in the statement "nonexistence by virtue of the essence of nonexistence or the contingent," where the essence of nonexistence and the contingent are presumed to be preponderating causes. The reply to this counter-objection would focus on whether the statement "If nothing has caused the contingent" in the argument means no influence whatsoever or no external influence.⁵⁷ In conclusion, the first argument of those who maintain that the nonexistence of the contingent is essentially preponderant has been refuted.

The second argument for this view is as follows: nonexistence occurs more easily than existence. This is because the contingent ceases to exist when a part

54 Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 155; Kemālpāşāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 244b.

55 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 169.

56 For Kemālpāşāzāde's criticism of Jurjānī on the same issue and the role of the distinction between temporality and intellectual rank in understanding the impossibility of the excluded third, see Erdem and Pehlivan, "Varlığın ve Yokluğun Ötesi," 90-3.

57 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 169.

of the complete cause ceases to exist, while the contingent only exists when the complete cause exists in its entirety.

Refuting this argument is easier: The ease with which the contingent's nonexistence occurs cannot be linked either to the essence of nonexistence or the essence of the contingent. To link this to its essence means the essence necessitates easy occurrence, but no such necessity arises out of the essence itself.

However, the proponents of this view might insist on it, saying that every part of the complete cause must be present for existence while the absence of a single condition is sufficient for nonexistence, and therefore nonexistence occurs more easily. Two replies can be made to this: Firstly, to say that ease is present and to say that ease arises by virtue of the contingent's essence are two different things. Secondly, as noted by Kemālpāšāzāde, whether the existence of conditions that must be present for existence is easier than the nonexistence of conditions that must be absent for nonexistence is impossible to decide rationally because some causes might occur more easily, while the ceasing of other conditions' existence might be more difficult. Because no real basis exists for provisions such as ease and difficulty, preponderance cannot be attributed to them.⁵⁸

(2b) Only flowing contingents are essentially suitable for nonexistence:⁵⁹ The argument of the proponents of this view can be described as follows: Flowing contingents include time, motion, and sound and their accidents such as propagation, velocity, volume, and pitch. These contingents are essentially unstable in the sense that their parts do not exist simultaneously. For these flowing contingents, nonexistence is suitable for if it were not, then they would have to exist continuously, but such contingents are known and can be experienced to move toward nonexistence. Hence, only flowing contingents are suitable for nonexistence by virtue of their essence (OSB). In *al-Ṣaḥā'if al-Ilāhiyya*, Samarqandī stated this view to be near to truth, whereas in *al-Ma'ārif*, he stated this to be the true view.⁶⁰ I will discuss this further below.

(2c) Of the two sides of the contingent, whichever one occurs is preponderant:⁶¹ Samarqandī stated this view to be especially prominent among a group of rational theologians. According to them, what occurs is preponderant and therefore

58 Kemālpāšāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 244b.

59 Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 155; Kemālpāšāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 244b.

60 Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 157; *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 170.

61 Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 155.

ontologically suitable in the absolute sense, though what they mean by this is not the suitability that arises from the essence of the contingent. The reasoning here is that if one side has occurred, the contingent must possess the causes that brought about its occurrence and made that side preponderant. When understood in this way, Samarqandī stated finding this view to be close to truth.⁶² Because preponderance is attributed not to the contingent's essence but to an external cause in this view, it stands in contrast to the view of Ibn Sīnā and his followers as described above in **(1)**. Thus, what exists according to this view is preponderant by virtue of a cause. In line with Ibn Sīnā's statement that "the existential (*wujūdī*) idea is realized due to a cause and this cause is an existential one, and the nonexistential idea is also due to a cause and this cause is the absence of the cause of the existential idea,"⁶³ this view maintains occurrence to be due to preponderance and preponderance to be due to a cause.

(2d) The contingent is ontologically suitable for existence if a cause is present but no condition: The contingent is suitable for existence if it has no need other than condition.⁶⁴ Samarqandī made the following counterclaim against this:

(2e) If there is no condition, nonexistence is preponderant: This is because the absence of a condition is sufficient for nonexistence. Existence, on the other hand, requires the existence of all things whose existence is required, namely the existence of a complete cause, and this becomes impossible when either a part of the cause or a condition ceases to exist. Because no variation or gradation is present in nonexistence, however, one cannot say that one state of nonexistence is more ontologically suitable than another.⁶⁵

This view is essentially based on Ibn Sīnā's remark that "a non-existential idea is also due to a cause, and this cause is the absence of the cause of the existential idea."⁶⁶ Thus, this view is hardly more than an elaboration of the Peripatetic principle often expressed as "the cause of nonexistence is the nonexistence of the cause."⁶⁷

62 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 170.

63 Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 37.

64 Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 155-7; Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 170; In the manuscript copy of Kemālpāšāzāde's work, although this view has been registered as "if there is a cause, nonexistence is suitable only if there is no condition," the reply to this view, which reads "the nonexistence of the effect is necessary at the moment of the condition's nonexistence, so how is it that existence is suitable?" indicates that this view was recorded incorrectly because this objection can only be in response to the view "Existence is suitable if there is an effector but not a condition." Kemālpāšāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 244b.

65 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 170.

66 Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 37.

67 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lubāb al-ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1986), 136.

Kemālpāšāzāde mentioned two other views in addition to these:

(2f) If a complete cause is present, then existence is preponderant.

(2g) If no complete cause is present, then nonexistence is preponderant. However, both of these views express an ontological suitability arising not from the essence of the contingent but from a cause that is external to the contingent.⁶⁸ Essentially, no opposition exists between these two and the majority view **(1)** discussed above.

Samarqandī's View of Ontological Suitability with the Condition of Non-Occurrence

Samarqandī elaborated on his views regarding ontological suitability in a passage that starts with "The truth is..." According to him:

(2b) Flowing contingents are essentially suitable for nonexistence.

(2h) The side with fewer conditions (*aqallu shartan*) is suitable for existence.

(2i) The side that occurs more often (*aktharu wuqū'an*) is suitable for existence.

(2j) The side that occurs more easily (*ashal*) (i.e., nonexistence) is suitable.⁶⁹

Samarqandī stated that either side of the contingent can be more ontologically suitable than the other, but he set one important condition: Suitability should not reach a point where it becomes sufficient for its relevant side to occur without a cause.

To show the validity of this condition, he presented the following argument:

Let the side of essential suitability be called A and the other side to which a cause is added B. If by virtue of its essential suitability the contingent obtained a preponderance that made A occur, the occurrence of B would either be essentially impossible or essentially contingent due to this suitability. If the occurrence of B were essentially impossible, the contingent would have to be transformed (*inqilāb*) into being impossible or necessary. If the occurrence of B were essentially contingent, the occurrence of A would depend on the absence of the cause of B, as the occurrence of the extremity of A is impossible when the cause of B, the other extremity, is present. The occurrence of A that depends on the absence of the cause of B means that suitability by itself is not sufficient for A to occur. However, the initial assumption was the opposite of this.⁷⁰

68 Kemālpāšāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 244b.

69 Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 157; *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 170.

70 Samarqandī, *al-Ṣaḥā'if*, 157; *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 170.

Consequently, as long as the preponderance of the contingent does not reach a point that is sufficient for its occurrence, one side of the contingent can be more suitable than the other.

Table 2.

Samarqandī's Classification of Views on Ontological Preponderance and Suitability

# in the Text	Object	Cause	Relevant side	Conclusion	Adhering group	Samarqandī's Verdict
1	Contingent	By virtue of its essence	Existence or nonexistence	Not suitable	Ibn Sinā and his followers	Debatable
2a	Every contingent	By virtue of its essence	Nonexistence	Suitable	Rational theologians	Wrong
2b	Flowing contingent	By virtue of its essence	Nonexistence	Suitable	Prevalent (in works of philosophy)	Close to being true / possible
2c	Contingent	Whichever side occurs through an external cause	That side (existence / nonexistence)	Preponderant/necessary	A group of rational theologians	Closer to being true / true
2d	Contingent	A cause exists, but no condition	Existence	Suitable	A group of philosophers	False
2e	Contingent	No condition exists, but a cause does	Nonexistence	Preponderant/necessary	+Samarqandī	True
2f	Contingent	A cause exists	Existence	Preponderant/necessary	Majority	True
2g	Contingent	Cause of non-existence is present (nonexistence of the cause)	Nonexistence	Preponderant/necessary	Majority	True
2h	Contingent	By virtue of carrying fewer conditions	Existence	Suitable	+Samarqandī	Possible
2i	Contingent	By virtue of occurring more frequently	Existence	Suitable	+Samarqandī	Possible
2j	Contingent	By virtue of occurring more easily	Nonexistence	Suitable	+Samarqandī	Possible

Appraisal of Samarqandī's Views on Ontological Suitability

Based on Samarqandī's arguments, he clearly agrees with the views that uphold the occurrence of ontological preponderance (*tarajjuh*) in the presence of a complete cause (i.e., when a complete cause for existence occurs in the case of existence or for nonexistence in the case of nonexistence). However, this section desires to focus not on Samarqandī's views on ontological preponderance but to discuss his views on ontological suitability (*awlawiyya*) by making some comparisons.

First discussion on **(2b)**: Can one think of the view where the flowing contingent is suitable for nonexistence by virtue of its essence as a case in which the contingent is able to occur by virtue of itself and without an external cause? Put more briefly, could Samarqandī's view of ontological suitability be interpreted as a kind of causeless preponderance? One should answer this question in the negative, because Samarqandī, like other rational theologians, located ontological suitability only on the side of nonexistence. However, a problem still occurs: Can one imagine a scenario where flowing contingents move from the realm of existence into nonexistence with no cause? Or can one at least imagine a scenario where no cause is involved in the nonexistence of these kinds of contingents?

Samarqandī's text yields two answers to this question: Firstly, because Samarqandī upheld a view that accords with rational theologians principle of absolute nonexistence can be neither cause nor effect, he is asserting existence to be subject to causality, while nonexistence, insofar as it is nonexistent, is not.⁷¹ Secondly, Samarqandī argued that the suitability involved here does not reach the limit of impossibility, despite flowing contingents being essentially suitable for nonexistence.⁷² This is because Samarqandī did not attribute the occurrence of either existence or nonexistence to ontological suitability but instead required preponderance through an external cause. His assertion that necessity and impossibility (and with them existence and nonexistence) can only occur through preponderance represents the majority view in Islamic thought.⁷³ Preponderance is present as long as existence continues to be predicated of the contingent by virtue of an external cause, where the essentially contingent becomes necessary through another. This is not essential necessity, but necessity through the condition of predication. Essential contingency does not contradict necessity through another; it contradicts essential necessity. Thus, the essentially contingent cannot realize itself.⁷⁴

71 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 169-70.

72 *Ibid*, 170.

73 *Ibid*, 98.

74 *Ibid*, 148.

Based on these explanations and the condition of nonoccurrence, can one argue that the view on flowing contingents being essentially suitable for nonexistence is contrary to Ibn Sinā's position where the contingent is essentially neutral toward existence and nonexistence? In order to tackle this question, scholars both before and after Samarqandī took up the issue of flowing contingents with diligence.

Rāzī was the first to address this question and responded to the exclusion of causeless existence from the suitability of the flowing contingent by distinguishing between (i) the existence and quiddity of such contingents and (ii) the persistence of an existent and its accidents.⁷⁵ The solution through the existence-quiddity distinction is easy to guess. Existence and its accidents can change depending on the presence of efficient and final causes and dispositions. Still, the modalities of contingency, necessity, and impossibility are determined with regard to quiddities. Thus, the contingent is neutral toward existence and nonexistence when considered by itself, whereas it is brought into relation to both when considered with respect to its cause. Theories about ontological suitability ignore Ibn Sinā's distinction between existence and quiddity by suggesting that one take accidents into account when determining modalities. The solution through distinguishing between persistence and accidents is as follows: With regard to their existence, such contingents as motion and time are stable and have a persistence similar to other existents. Their flow, however, is by virtue of their accidents. The continuous creation and rapid change of these accidents lead one to falsely imagine their existence to be transitory. Therefore, to argue in favor of suitability based on the rapid change of their accidents and their illusory passage from existence into nonexistence is incorrect.⁷⁶ Consequently, Rāzī denied that flowing contingents have an ontological suitability for nonexistence by virtue of their essence.

Ṭūsī, on the other hand, took the distinction between the essentially contingent and impossible through another as his point of departure, which allowed him to respond to the argument concerning the persistence of flowing contingents that are not ontologically suitable for non-existence. This is because while motion and time are persistent by virtue of their essence, their non-persistence is by virtue of another.⁷⁷ Jurjānī based his view on the distinction between primary existence/nonexistence and the concomitants of quiddity. In his view, these contingents

75 Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya*, 126-7.

76 Kemālpāšāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 243b-244.

77 Ṭūsī, *Talkhiṣ al-muḥaṣṣal*, 250.

have equal relationships to primary existence and nonexistence, but because their quiddities require elapsing and renewal, they preclude continuity. Kemālpāšāzāde drew on the distinction between existence and persistence, emphasizing existence to be different from persistence and to not imply it. Thus, the fact that the contingents in question are not neutral toward persistence and extinction does not imply that they are not neutral toward primary existence and nonexistence.⁷⁸ In conclusion, although their reasonings differ, these scholars denied that flowing contingents have an ontological suitability for nonexistence by virtue of their essence.

The discussion about **(2b)** is about the ability to understand the claim of flowing contingents being essentially suitable for nonexistence as implying a gradation between existence and nonexistence. In other words, do intermediate states or transitional segments exist between existence and nonexistence where the otherwise sharp distinction between the two no longer applies? Can one find a situation in which the principle of noncontradiction, according to which “The same thing belonging and not belonging at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect is impossible,”⁷⁹ does not hold?

If these questions are answered in the affirmative, the principle of non-contradiction has been violated. As can be surmised from Samarqandī’s position on preponderance (*rujhāniyya*), he thought an opposition of contrariety exists between existence and nonexistence (i.e., a contradiction occurs between primary existence and nonexistence).⁸⁰ In *Bishārāt al-Ishārāt*, Samarqandī described this contradiction as follows:⁸¹

Absolute contradiction is either an essential contradiction between two things with respect to existence and nonexistence or the difference of two concepts with respect to existence and nonexistence in a way where the occurrence of one essentially necessitates the nonexistence of the other. To be opposite means that when one opposite exists necessarily, the other must be necessarily nonexistent.⁸²

A second consequence of answering this question in the affirmative is the violation of the principle of the excluded middle. Similar to the state between

78 Kemālpāšāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 244b.

79 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *Metafizik*, trans. Ahmet Arslan (İstanbul: Sosyal Yayınları, 1996), 201-2, 1005b19.

80 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma’ārif*, 107.

81 Samarqandī describes the principle of non-contradiction by distinguishing between its logical and ontological forms. Here, we only pay attention to its ontological form. Samarqandī, *Bishārāt al-Ishārāt*, I, 141-42.

82 *Ibid*, 142.

existence and nonexistence, Samarqandī denied the existence of an intermediary that, while not itself existing, is instead an attribute of another existent.⁸³ Thus, although he affirmed the suitability of the contingent for existence or nonexistence either essentially or by virtue of another on the condition of its nonoccurrence, he rejected the ambiguity associated with a gradated realm between existence and nonexistence. Consequently, primary existence and nonexistence can in his view neither be joined nor eliminated together. For a thing to neither be existent nor simultaneously be nonexistent or to both exist and not exist at the same time is impossible. As a result, one can argue Samarqandī's view of ontological suitability to contradict neither the principle of non-contradiction nor the excluded middle.

The discussion about **(2h)** is on how one should understand Samarqandī's claim that one side of the contingent is ontologically suitable because it carries fewer conditions. I mentioned earlier Samarqandī's statement that the absence of even one condition generates sufficient preponderance for nonexistence. This means that the scarcity or abundance of conditions makes no difference on the outcome in terms of being on the side of nonexistence. Regardless of whether what disappears is a part of the cause or one of the conditions, existence is rendered impossible. And because primary existence precludes any variation or gradation, one situation is not more suitable for nonexistence than another.⁸⁴ Therefore, the claim that the contingent is suitable by virtue of carrying fewer conditions is true only for the side of existence. To give an example, suppose a rooster is crowing and chicks are peeping at dawn. While the rooster's crow depends only on waking up as its condition, the peeping of chicks depends on both their waking up and the rooster's crowing, because in accordance with their hierarchy, they can only peep once the rooster has crowed. One would say here that the crowing of the rooster at dawn is more suitable. As Kemālpāşāzāde stated, however, having an ontological suitability based on the quantity of conditions seems impossible,⁸⁵ just as it is impossible to determine whether the conditions of existence or nonexistence occur more easily. This is because some conditions might be fewer in quantity but occur with more difficulty. Consequently, the quantity of conditions does not provide a general rule for suitability, and so Samarqandī's view that links suitability for existence to fewer conditions cannot be considered a general rule.

83 Samarqandī, *al-Şahā'if*, 93-95.

84 Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-ma'ārif*, 170.

85 Kemālpāşāzāde, *Risāla fī taḥqīq*, 243b-244.

The discussion about **(2i)** is about how one should understand Samarqandī's claim that one side of the contingent is suitable for existence because it occurs more often. Firstly, many scholars such as Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd, and Rāzī must be noted to have classified contingents according to their frequency of existence. According to Ibn Sīnā, a contingent that occurs more frequently is one whose causes are more frequently found.⁸⁶ Ibn Rushd stated that this class of contingents is sometimes assumed to not need a preponderating factor.⁸⁷ Some examples of contingents that occur frequently are beard growth in males and the laxative effects of scammony. Ibn Sīnā drew a further distinction between contingents that occur frequently and those that occur always. While a contingent that always occurs cannot be prevented by an opposition or any other condition, a frequently occurring contingent can be stopped by an impediment and occurs only on the condition of that impediment's absence, which would thus make it necessary.⁸⁸ Moreover, the qualifications of frequently and rarely apply to both existence and nonexistence.⁸⁹ For the rarely occurring contingent, nonexistence is suitable, even though its existence is not impossible.⁹⁰ An example of a rarely occurring contingent is six-fingeredness in human beings.⁹¹

On the basis of the preceding discussion, Samarqandī maintained that contingents possess an ontological suitability. However, as Ṭūsī indicated, the qualifications of frequently (*'ala al-akthar*), rarely (*'ala al-aqall*), and equally (*al-mutasāwi*) should not be taken as modes. These words and expressions do not refer to modalities. Instead, they refer to different frequencies⁹² at which contingents, which have the modality of contingency, come into existence. Hence, one should understand Samarqandī's statements in favor of an ontological suitability in the contingent that is otherwise neutral toward existence and nonexistence as essentially statistical and describing the frequency of occurrence.

The discussion about **(2j)** involves whether Samarqandī's claim that the contingent is suitable for nonexistence because one of its sides occurs more

86 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt fī ḥikmat al-mantiqiyya wa-l-ṭab 'iyya wa-l-ilāhiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-afāq al-jadida, 1985), 111.

87 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964), 61.

88 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Samā' al-ṭabī 'i min kitāb al-shifā'*, ed. Ja'far al-Yāsīn (Beirut: Dār al-Manāhil, 1996), 119.

89 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān min kitāb al-shifā'*, ed. Abū l-Alā Afīfī (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a l-Amiriyya, 1966), 249.

90 Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya*, I, 91.

91 Ṭūsī, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt ma'a sharḥ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960), I, 516-7.

92 *Ibid.*

easily should be interpreted in the same way. Similar to Ibn Sīnā's classification of contingents into *frequently* and *rarely* occurring based on the frequency of their causes, the categories of easily occurring and hard-to-occur contingents can be introduced. One can say that nonexistence occurs more easily due to existence requiring all the parts of the complete cause, with the absence of even one part of the cause being sufficient for nonexistence. But if one heeds the earlier statement from Kemālpāşāzāde (i.e., the existence of all parts of the cause can sometimes occur more easily than the absence of one part), the claim that ease renders one side of the contingent more suitable than the other becomes incorrect.

Conclusion

Ibn Sīnā defined the contingent as absolutely neutral toward the sides of existence and nonexistence. Hence, the preponderance that determines the contingent's existence and nonexistence does not occur by virtue of its essence but instead needs an external cause. This external cause is a complete cause. If a complete cause exists, having the effect not accompany the cause is impossible. Consequently, in Ibn Sīnā's view, everything that occurs or does not occur is by necessity. In other words, nothing that occurs can occur and nothing that ceases to exist can cease to exist by remaining at the limit of contingency.

Issues surrounding the sufficient reason premise of the argument from contingency led Rāzī to firstly distinguish between ontological preponderance (*tarajjuh*) and ontological suitability (*awlawiyya*) and opened up a new field of debate. Rāzī secondly further distinguished between preponderance without a preponderating cause (*al-tarajjuh bi-lā murajjih*; i.e., without a sufficient reason) and the agent's preference without a preponderating cause (*al-tarjih bi-lā murajjih*); this distinction enabled him to discuss the role of God's will in the occurrence of the effect after preponderance. He thirdly problematized the simultaneous presence in the contingent of preponderance based on sufficient reason and ontological suitability arising from the contingent by virtue of its essence. Fourthly, Rāzī then put the concepts of essential suitability and suitability by virtue of another at the center of a new discussion, providing their definitions and illustrating them with examples. Rāzī's aim in drawing new distinctions and inventing new problems was essentially to strengthen the argument from contingency by identifying and responding to potential objections against it.

On the other hand, Samarqandī revisited the issues he had inherited from Ibn Sīnā and Rāzī, laid out the alternative positions regarding these, and developed his own position on ontological suitability. One can summarize Samarqandī's views on preponderance and suitability as follows:

Samarqandī accepted the preponderance and thus the necessity of the existence side of the contingent at the moment of the existence of its cause, as well as the preponderance and thus the necessity of its nonexistence at the moment of the nonexistence of its cause. He therefore criticized the view some rational theologians had asserted wherein nonexistence does not require a cause. Samarqandī's views up to this point agree with those of Ibn Sīnā and the majority of the philosophers. On the question of ontological suitability, however, he adopted different views. For instance, Samarqandī claimed that flowing contingents are essentially suitable for nonexistence, and that some contingents are suitable for existence because they occur more often, while others are suitable for nonexistence because they occur more easily or have fewer conditions. However, none of these forms of suitability can make one side of the contingent occur *despite* the cause. One can therefore say that Samarqandī did not consider the suitability of the contingent antithetical to existence or nonexistence, and so his view of suitability did not lead him to reject the principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle. Ontological suitability does not imply the realization of the contingent in the external world unless an external cause and preponderance (*rujḥāniyya*) are present. Suitability can occur in the contingent by virtue of the contingent's essence, as in the case of flowing contingents, or by virtue of an accidental state such as occurring more frequently, occurring more easily, or having fewer conditions. Regarding these states, while the contingent's suitability for existence refers to a higher statistical probability of its existence, its suitability for nonexistence indicates causes that have fewer conditions or occur more easily. Ultimately, these refer not to the essence of the contingent but to its conditions for realization, ontological accidents, and states attached to it. Consequently, unlike the causeless preponderance involved in OSA, Samarqandī did not defend a position on ontological suitability that rejected the principle of sufficient reason. Hence, designating the separable and inseparable accidents of the existence of contingents as modalities and referring to them as suitable for existence or nonexistence do not seem plausible, as in the exemplified case of a fluid or the unstable structures of time and sound. This is because modalities are not determined according to the contingent's existence, the accidents related to its existence, or the changes it undergoes. Instead, they are determined with respect to the quiddity of the contingent as necessity, contingency, or impossibility.

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