

reduces to the ontological. Ibn Sīnā follows Fārābī in drawing further distinctions within the realms of the necessary and possible:

The necessary being may be so either *per se* or not *per se*. In the former case a contradiction is involved if it is assumed to be non-existent As for the being which is necessary but not *per se*, this is a being which is necessary, provided a certain being other than it is given Everything that is necessarily existent *ab alio* is possibly existent *per se* Considered in its essence it is possible; considered in actual relation to that other being it is necessary, and, the relation to that other being considered as removed, it is impossible.¹³⁵

Here we find what we previously encountered in Fārābī: 'necessary' is now used in the sense of eternal, and there are two types of such beings, of which only the necessary *per se* is logically necessary. The other type of being is only derivatively necessary; in terms of essence and existence it is still possible *per se*. Derivatively necessary beings are such because of their relation to a cause of which they are the effect;¹³⁶ should the cause be removed, they become impossible beings, not in the usual sense of logically impossible, but more in the sense of actually impossible.¹³⁷ Hence, for ibn Sīnā, 'necessary being' can mean either logically necessary being (necessary *per se*) or actually necessary being (eternal being). God is both logically and actually necessary, while the Intelligences which emanate from Him are actually necessary.¹³⁸

With these two distinctions in hand, we may turn to ibn Sīnā's argument for the existence of God. Because he believes in the necessary emanation of the world from God, he, like Fārābī before him, rejects the *kalām* argument from creation, and develops instead his argument from contingency.¹³⁹ In his *al-Risālat*, ibn Sīnā formulates the argument in this fashion:

Whatever has being must either have a reason for its being or have no reason for it. If it has a reason, then it is contingent, equally before it comes into being (if we make this mental hypothesis) and when it is in the state of being—for in the case of a thing whose being is contingent the mere fact of its entering upon being does not remove from it the contingent nature of its being. If on the other hand it has no reason for its being in any way whatsoever, then it is necessary in its being. This rule having been confirmed, I shall now proceed to prove that there is in being a being which has no reason for its being.

Such a being is either contingent or necessary. If it is necessary, then

the point we sought to prove is established. If on the other hand it is contingent that which is contingent cannot enter upon being except for some reason which sways the scales in favour of its being and against its not-being. If the reason is also contingent, then there is a chain of contingents linked one to the other, and there is no being at all; for this being which is the subject of our hypothesis cannot enter into being so long as it is not preceded by an infinite succession of beings, which is absurd. Therefore, contingent beings end in a Necessary Being.¹⁴⁰

The origins of the proof are not difficult to discern. We find Fārābī's distinction between possible and necessary being, the *mutakallimūn* insistence on the need for a determinant, and the Aristotelian argument against an infinite regress. We may outline the proof so:

1. Definitions:

- a. Every being has either a reason for its existence or no reason for its existence.
- b. A being which has a reason for its existence is contingent, both before it exists and after it exists
 - i. because its actually coming to exist does not remove the contingent nature of its existence.
- c. A being which has no reason for its existence is necessary.

2. Every being is either contingent or necessary.

3. If it is necessary, then a necessary being exists.

4. If it is contingent, then a necessary being exists because:

- a. A contingent being cannot come into existence without a reason.
- b. If this reason is also contingent, then there is a series of contingent beings linked together.
- c. Such a series cannot be infinite
 - i. because then there would be no being at all
 - a. because the being in question could come into existence only if it were preceded by an infinite succession of beings, which is absurd.
- d. Therefore, the series must terminate in a necessary being.

5. Therefore, a necessary being exists.

The argument is much more profound than it appears at face value, and we would be apt to misinterpret it if we did not keep in mind the metaphysical distinctions just discussed. We have called the first step in the proof *definitions* because it does not appear that ibn Sīnā is here *arguing* that a being without a reason for its existence is contingent;

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