The philosophical proof for God's existence between Europe and the Islamic World : reflections on an entangled history of philosophy and its contemporary relevance

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The Philosophical Proof for God's Existence between Europe and the Islamic World: Reflections on an Entangled History of Philosophy and Its Contemporary Relevance

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Abstract: The Argument for God's Existence is one of the major issues in the history of philosophy. It also constitutes an illuminating example of a shared philosophical problem in the entangled intellectual histories of Europe and the Islamic World. Drawing on Aristotle, various forms of the argument were appropriated by both rational Islamic Theology (*kalām*) and Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna. Whereas the argument, reshaped, refined and modified, has been intensively discussed throughout the entire post-classical era, particularly in the Islamic East, it has likewise been adopted in the West by thinkers such as the Hebrew Polymath Maimonides and the Medieval Latin Philosopher and Theologian Thomas Aquinas. However, these mutual reception-processes did not end in the middle ages. They can be witnessed in the twentieth century and even up until today: On the one hand, we see a Middle Eastern thinker like the Iranian philosopher Mahdī Ḥā'irī Yazdī re-evaluating Kant's fundamental critique of the classical philosophical arguments for God's existence, in particular of the ontological proof, and refuting the critique. On the other hand, an argument from creation brought forward by the Islamic Theologian and critic of the peripatetic tradition al-Ghazāli has been adopted by a strand of Western philosophers who label their own version "The Kalām-cosmological Argument". By discussing important cornerstones in the history of the philosophical proof for God's existence we argue for a re-consideration of current Eurocentric narratives in the history of philosophy and suggest that such a transcultural perspective may also provide inspiration for current philosophical discourses between Europe, the Middle East and beyond.

Keywords: God's existence, ontological argument, cosmological argument, argument from motion, argument from being, a priori argument, unum argumentum

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1 Introduction

The philosophical proof for God's existence is a theme which has arisen time and again in the history of philosophy, both in Europe and the Islamic World. Prominent thinkers, such as Aristotle and Avicenna, have tried to effect a rational demonstration of God's existence and, despite much criticism of such attempts and of the goal in general, the proof of God's existence remains, as ever, a topic current in contemporary philosophy. In this inquiry, various arguments for the existence of God, from Antiquity to the present, will be discussed. The aim in setting these out, however, is not to present a sort of kaleidoscope of argumentation. Still less is it about the assessment of these arguments, i. e. the evaluation of whether and to what extent different thinkers have achieved their goal. This study is focused rather on something else, which can be summarised into two principal reflections.

The first reflection concerns the question of how research in the history of philosophy should be conducted and presented. The most common answer is that individual, geographically or linguistically defined traditions of philosophising are considered in themselves and set out in publications like 'Philosophy in India', 'Philosophy in the Islamic World' or 'Philosophy in the Latin Middle Ages'. This is sensible from a pragmatic point of view. As a point of departure, we do indeed require a detailed knowledge of different philosophical traditions, and it would be most heartening if we could claim to possess such a knowledge for all geographical regions. Nevertheless, only a part of the true situation can be captured with a methodological approach of this kind. In reality, there have never been regionally closed off traditions of philosophising, explicable only in terms of themselves. That goes in particular measure for the regions of Europe and the Islamic World (independently of how we wish to define these terms today or for other historical epochs). An intellectual exchange has always taken place between these two areas. To a certain extent, we are aware of this process whenever we call to mind the two great translation movements that have taken place 'between' these two regions: the process of Greek-Arabic translation, which lasted from the mid-eighth to the mid-tenth centuries; and the process of Arabic-Latin translation, which took place largely from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. Neither movement, however, constituted an isolated event. The opposite is the case: they were part of an ongoing process of encounter and ensuing appropriation or differentiation. Admittedly, this process culminated in certain historical phases, but had always taken place in one form or another and continues to do so up to today.

That can be established already at the level of the translations. These were not, in fact, restricted to individual, isolated phases of contact. Rather, they had

always accompanied the march of intellectual history in the Islamic World, as well as Europe. To put this more concretely, and from the perspective of the Islamic World: since the early Islamic period it is well established that there has been no century in which scientific texts have not been translated from or into a language of the Islamic World.[1] Furthermore, there are other ways in which ideas and arguments can spread. These have equally led to connections between the philosophical traditions of Europe and the Islamic World, hence the term 'entangled history of philosophy' is used deliberately in the sub-title of this contribution.

Beyond this, a second reflection is instructive for our study. It concerns the question of how the mobility of thought, viz. the concept of an entangled history of philosophy, can be demonstrated in practice and made useful for the purpose of concrete analysis. Here arises the pragmatic answer that it would likely be sensible initially to take individual philosophical questions and problems into consideration, since, at this level, i. e. in the engagement with concrete themes which philosophy has always put forward, the connections between different thinkers, debates and teaching traditions reveal themselves best. If here in the subtitle we talk of 'an entangled history of philosophy', this has thus a double meaning. It is not simply about bringing the entanglement between Europe and the Islamic World into focus, but also about striving towards a combination of historical and systematic research perspectives.

This will be shown in what follows for the example of the proof of God's existence. In this regard, it is important to stress – especially as we are talking about the Islamic World – that we really do mean a philosophical problematic.

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1 The history of scientific translations (by "scientific" we mean translations of texts produced within the realm of philosophy and the natural sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine etc.) related to the Islamic world has not yet been written, but the fact that such translations have taken place throughout its history is undisputable. So far, we know about a whole series of activities concerning several languages and different geographical regions, such as the translations from Greek into Syriac (starting already in the fifth century), Greek (and Syriac) into Arabic (from the eighth century onward), Middle Persian into Arabic (eighth-ninth centuries), Arabic into (New) Persian (from the tenth century onward), Arabic into Latin (from the tenth century onward), Arabic into Hebrew (from the eleventh century onward), Sanskrit into Persian (starting in the thirteenth century and culminating in the sixteenth century), Hebrew into Latin (particularly in the fifteenth century), Arabic, Persian, Turkish etc. into English, French etc. (starting in the seventeenth century at European universities), Greek into Arabic (eighteenth century at the Ottoman court), English, French, and other European languages into Arabic, Persian, Turkish etc. (starting in the nineteenth century). Recently, this topic has been discussed extensively in a workshop on "Philosophy and Translation in the Islamic World" convened by Ulrich Rudolph and Robert Wisnovsky. The Proceedings of the workshop will appear in the series "Philosophy in the Islamic World in Context" published by De Gruyter.

The object of our reflections is neither religious experience nor theological justification. At the centre stands rather a philosophical question, namely *whether* and, where appropriate, *how* being as such, i. e. that reality which is accessible to us, can be traced back to a primary principle (traditionally referred to as God). This has evidently occupied philosophers for centuries, leading to numerous, interesting argumentational strategies. Some of these shall be presented and discussed in what follows, keeping the question of the historical and systematic connection between the individual arguments in the foreground.

2 Aristotle

2.1 The argument from motion

The exposition must begin with Aristotle. He was admittedly not the first thinker to have engaged with our problematic, but his presentation of the theme was foundational and came to be crucial for the entire later debate. That goes especially for the argument which is referred to here as the 'argument from motion'. It was discussed by Aristotle in various contexts, particularly in books VII and VIII of the *Physics*, as well as book XII of the *Metaphysics*, which later became the *locus classicus* for the exposition of the philosophical proof of God's existence.[2]

The point of departure here is the observation that all material things which we can perceive in the world are in motion. By motion, Aristotle understands not only change of location, but every kind of change which can occur to a substance: motion in space, quantitative change through growth and reduction, qualitative change and – at least in a certain respect – even the becoming and ceasing-to-be of a substance.[3] Motion is accordingly one of the foundational phenomena of nature for him. It is 'the fulfilment of the actualisation (ἐντελέχεια, ἐνέργεια) of that which has potentiality (δύναμις), in so far as it is potential'.[4] It is true that Aristotle explains at numerous locations that natural things, in so far as striving towards the actualisation of their potential is proper to them, contain the cause of their motion within themselves (ἀρχή κινήσεως).[5] However, the numerous changes which occur to them cannot be attributed to this cause alone. They can

2 For summaries of the argument see Davidson 1987: 237–240; Höffe 1999: 160–166; Flashar 2004: 335–337.

3 *Phys.* III 1, 201a9ff.; cf. V 5, 229a31 and VIII 7, 261a27ff.; see Föllinger 2005a, 2005b.

4 *Phys.* III 1, 201a10f.; cf. III 2, 2016b27ff.; VIII 1, 251a8ff.; *Met.* XI 9, 1065b15ff.

5 *Phys.* II 1, 192b13ff.; cf. *De Generatione animalium* II 1, 735a3f.

only be explained if we posit external causes for motion and change. This leads us to the first tenet central to his argumentation, namely that everything is in motion due to something else, i. e. is set in motion by a cause.

Observation and experience reveal, however, that it is insufficient to identify only the direct cause of a motion. This cause always has another cause which in turn has another, so that we arrive at a causal chain which grows ever longer. The chain cannot be endless however. Something must constitute its beginning and have initiated the totality of effects, since there would otherwise be no causality at all. Consequently, we must seek out the proper cause of motion in this world, something Aristotle does in two steps: (1.) He initially traces the diverse motions which exist in the world, and which each have a beginning and an end, back to a superordinate, continuous motion. This is the motion of the planets, which follow their course across the heavens. They proceed in a circular pattern, they are ordered hierarchically and they reach their summit in the motion of the first heaven, i. e. the heaven of the fixed stars, which puts the first motion into effect and thereby sets everything else in motion. (2.) The first motion, however, cannot be explained in terms of itself, but requires a cause in turn. Consequently, there must be a further being, apart from the first heaven, a first substance back to which the motion of the highest heaven can be traced. It must not be in motion itself, as, otherwise, this motion would have to be explained yet again. It must also be unique, because the heaven of the fixed stars only puts into effect a circular motion, and because, in any case, 'everything is ordered towards the one'.[6] In Aristotle's view, this successfully demonstrates that there is a first substance which stands as the origin of all motion in the world and can be referred to as the 'unmoved mover'.[7]

What then can be asserted about this highest being? According to Aristotle, it moves the heaven of the fixed stars not as an efficient cause, but as a final cause, since it moves things 'as a beloved' which is sought after by them.[8] It is invariable, pure actuality, without potentiality, eternal and fully realised being,[9] existent by virtue of necessity.[10] Likewise, it is the highest end, pure spirit, 'a thinking of thinking', as a famous formulation from *Metaphysics* XII puts it.[11] Moreover, the highest, fully realised being is expressly equated at one point with 'God' by Aristotle.[12]

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6 *Met.* XII 10, 1075a18f.
7 *Met.* XII 7, 1072a25 and 8, 1073a27.
8 *Met.* XII 7, 1072b3.
9 *Met.* XII 7, 1073a4 and 8, 1073b20.
10 *Met.* XII 7, 1072b10: ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐστὶν ὄν.
11 *Met.* XII 9, 1074b33ff.: νόησις νοήσεως.
12 *Met.* XII 7, 1072b73ff.

This all allows us to consider Aristotle's reflections a philosophical proof for the existence of God, since he argues for the existence of a highest principle, whose position with regard to all other beings is unique and which is considered by him to be 'the divine'. It is important here to note, however, that Aristotle's God – in comparison to other conceptions of God to which we will turn later – has merely a restricted function. It is described only as the cause of motion, but not as the principle back to which the existence of this world can be traced. In Aristotle's view, this requires no explanation, since, for him, its existence has always been a given fact. Thus his God is not the foundation of the world's existence, but rather the highest being, from which all movement in the world proceeds.

Considered systematically, Aristotle's argumentation rests on two axioms. One of these declares, as seen already, that every moving thing has been set in motion by a cause. The other consists in the assumption that a causal chain cannot be infinite, but must go back to a first cause. Strictly, the latter cannot be taken only in regard to the explanation of phenomena of motion, since if it is true that every causal chain must have a beginning, this claim applies to every form of causality. In other words: the famous 'argument from motion' is not at all an independent argument, but a special case of a more foundational reflection. It combines a particular supposition (the necessity of a causal being behind all motion) with a general supposition (the necessity of a beginning for every causal chain), which alone would have sufficed to reach the desired object of proof (the existence of a first cause). Aristotle apparently saw it this way too, since he formulated a further proof of God's existence at another point (*Metaphysics* II), where he takes account of this fact. It is much less well known than the 'argument from motion', but has – viewed systematically – the greater reach, hence this reflection shall also be presented briefly here.

2.2 The argument from the impossibility of an infinite causal chain

The point of departure for this reflection is the assertion that numerous causal chains are demonstrably present in the world.[13] Three levels of this consideration can be differentiated: (1.) the final effect of the whole chain, which usually stands at the beginning of our reflection; (2.) its immediate cause, which, as a rule, goes back to a further cause, and this to a third etc., such that the numerous members assume their places in the causal chain; (3.) something

13 A summary of the argument is given by Davidson 1987: 336–345.

which has initiated the entire chain, viz. is constantly producing its effect and thus can be designated the first cause.

Of these elements, only the last named is a real cause. All other members of the chain are not, in themselves, causes, but become so because the first member exercises a causal effect on them. If the chain had no beginning, there would be no causality at all. That, however, is impossible, since we know that there is causal activity, the final effect of which we are able to observe. There must also thus be a first cause, which has set all of this in motion, and which sustains the causal effect within the chain.[14]

In this location in *Metaphysics* II there is talk only of a 'First (cause)'.[15] In contrast to *Metaphysics* XII Aristotle says nothing about 'God', so strictly this is not about a proof for God's existence.[16] Nevertheless, his reflections here are taken by many readers and interpreters as a proof for God's existence or at least understood as sufficient grounds for a proof of God's existence. We encounter them in this sense amongst numerous later Jewish, Christian or Islamic thinkers.

3 Islamic theology (*kalām*): The argument from accidents

One example of this can be found in early Islamic theology (*kalām*), which was not truly Aristotelian in inclination, but had its own orientation. It emerged from the Qur'an and discussion in the early Muslim community, leading to the posing of questions and concepts which were characteristic only of *kalām*.[17] This occurred, however, within an intellectual framework of broad foundations, in which the philosophical heritage of antiquity, including the Aristotelian *Physics* and *Metaphysics* played a role. Both texts were, moreover, translated into Arabic early: the *Metaphysics* twice, by Eustathius (fl. ca. 830) and Isḥāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 910); the *Physics* more than thrice.[18] That alone shows how important the two texts were for the debate which was carried out in the Islamic World at this time. To this were added numerous further texts from the

14 *Met.* II 2, 994a1–19 and 994b2–31.

15 *Met.* II 2, 994a19 and 994b6: πρῶτον.

16 The 'first cause' could also be an object without life or a mechanical principle which would prevent the designation 'God'.

17 For a conceptual analysis see Frank 1992: 7–37; a detailed history of early Muslim theology is given by van Ess 1991–1997.

18 Gutas 1998: 72–73.

Corpus Aristotelicum, which became available in Arabic during the Greek-Arabic translation movement (ca.750–950).[19] Aside from this, we know by now that before this process, as well as parallel with it, elements of Antique thought were transmitted to the Muslims, and would very quickly play a role within internal Islamic discourse.[20]

The complex relationship of early *kalām* to Antique philosophy also reveals itself in regard to its proof for God's existence, which is what interests us here. It rests, on the one hand, on a physical-ontological model which was developed independently of Aristotle and his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. On the other hand, Islamic theologians demonstrably used arguments that derive from these texts to back up their method of proof.

The physical-ontological model, which served as the basis of their reflections, was conceived by a theologian of the name of Abū l-Huḏayl (d. 841 or 849). From various older conceptions of the physical structure of the world, he formed a concept which would find widespread acceptance and would later be seen as one of the characteristic theoretical elements of *kalām*. According to him, all sensible, perceptible things in the world exhibit an atomical structure, since they consist of two components: (a.) atoms, which in themselves possess no materiality, but, as soon as they are combined with one another, constitute the material building blocks of bodies; and (b.) accidents, which give bodies various attributes (such as rest, movement, colour, hardness etc.), and which occur in them in ever new and changing constellations. Each body is therefore a composite. It consists in atoms and accidents together, which in themselves are integral constituents of that body.[21] That prompted Abū l-Huḏayl to formulate a proof for God's existence derived from this model and especially from the role played by the accidents therein.

The argument which is referred to as 'the argument from accidents', consists of four conceptual steps: (1.) We assert that accidents exist. This arises from the observation that nothing which we can perceive and observe in the world is without attributes, i. e. without accidents. (2.) We assert that accidents originated in time. This follows as a consequence of the fact that everything we can observe changes; its attributes come into being and cease to be, in what is apparently a perpetual process. (3.) No body can exist in the world without accidents, since all have attributes such as rest or movement, compositionality, colour etc. Otherwise,

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19 Cf. the list of translations given by Gutas 2017: 121–135.

20 For examples from natural philosophy, see Dhanani 1994, for examples from logic, see Schöck 2006.

21 Van Ess 1991–1997: 3: 224–229; cf. also Dhanani 1994: 38–40 and 55–62, and Rudolph 2015: 244–245, where the model is contextualized and compared to other ideas which were developed in early *Kalām*.

they would not be bodies, as these consist in atoms and accidents by definition. (4.) That which cannot be *without* accidents also cannot exist *before* the accidents exist. Consequently, bodies must also come to be in time. They are thus caused and must be traced back to a cause, which we designate as God.[22]

The argument would long remain the most important proof of God's existence in Islamic theology.[23] It was not, however, undisputed. The objection of the critics was directed especially towards the fourth point, which appeared inconsistent to him. If it is a characteristic of accidents to inhere in bodies and then to pass away, the question arises why this was not always already the case. It could also be, according to the critics, that the material had existed from eternity and that the various attributes had emerged in it in an eternal process of change. This would require no external cause to explain its existence, whereby the proof of God's existence has been invalidated.[24]

The sources are silent on whether Abū l-Huḏayl himself had reacted to this objection. We know, however, that later theologians were concerned to respond. So, for example, the following reflections are transmitted from Abū l-Ḥasan al-Aš'arī (d. 935), a significant theologian active two generations after Abū l-Huḏayl: if every movement occurring in a body in this world were preceded in turn by another movement, then movement would never have come to be, since 'what has no end has no beginning (moment of origination)'.[25] Thus there must have been a beginning of this world, which has its basis in itself and is independent of anything else.

The interesting thing in this debate consists in the fact that both parties – the Islamic theologians and the critics – could have recourse to statements of Aristotle. The critics invoked his thinking on motion, since it declared that the world was indeed always already in motion and had existed from eternity as an ordered system of motions. That fits well with the concept of eternally changing accidents, which sets them against the idea of a temporal origination of the world. The theologians, on the other hand, took over the Aristotelian principle of the impossibility of an infinite chain of causes. With his help, they could postulate that there must be a first cause for everything, from which, in their

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22 van Ess 1991–1997: 3: 229–232; Gimaret 1990: 219–227; cf. Davidson 1987: 134–135.

23 Davidson 1987: 136–146; for other arguments see Gimaret 1990: 228–234, and Rudolph 2015: 233–242.

24 The objection was raised by a group of thinkers, usually named 'Dahriyya', who claimed that the world (or at least its primordial material principle) has eternally existed. For a general description of the group and its doctrine see Rudolph 2015: 167–169, for the particular argument mentioned here see Gimaret 1990: 225–226.

25 *Mā lā nihāya lahū lā ḥudūṯa lahū*; cf. Gimaret 1990: 226, who refers to al-Aš'arī's *Risālat al-Ḥaṯṯ*.

view, a proof for the existence of God was effected. In taking over the principle however, they transferred it from the ontological level (for which it had been conceived) to the temporal level. Only in this way could it successfully serve as a demonstration that God was not only the summit of the physical world-system, but the creator and foundation of the world's existence. That substantially extends the original argumentation, but weakens it in its inner logic. Aristotle had begun from a strong concept of causality: for him, a true causal relationship is present only if a cause acts by necessity, meaning that its effect must always proceed from it and that cause and effect exist simultaneously. The theologians, in contrast, accepted (viz. postulated, even) a temporal succession of creator and world. They thereby dissolved the necessary connection between cause and effect, which has the further implication that the inference of a first, divine cause from the effect, viz. from the chain of intra-worldly causes and effects, is no longer necessarily valid.

4 Avicenna: The argument from being

This problem was apparently recognised by Avicenna (d. 1037). He developed a new proof for God's existence, which exhibits a completely new approach to the theme. At the same time, he used elements that derived from the reflections discussed so far: from Aristotle, for example, the argument that a causal chain could never be infinite, as well as the conception that causality must always rest upon a necessary connection between cause and effect; and from the Islamic theologians the claim that the proposed first cause must be not only the cause of all motion, but the grounds of existence of all things.

For Avicenna, being is the primary, incontrovertible fact, recognised by every human qua *animal rationale*. It is not only a foundational experience, which arises from our procession through the world, but a concept, which is impressed upon every understanding from the beginning. For this reason, Avicenna writes right at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* of *The Healing* (*Kitāb al-Šifāʾ*), one of his two main works: 'We say: The ideas of 'the existent,' 'the thing,' and 'the necessary' are impressed in the soul in a primary way. This impression does not require better known things to bring it about.'[26]

The fact that something exists, however, is not self-evident. Rather, it requires a justification, as no being that we can perceive is autonomous and

26 *Kitāb al-Šifāʾ, al-Ilāhiyyāt* I 5; English translation by Michael Marmura: *Avicenna* 2004a: 22, line 19–21.

carries the foundation of its existence in itself. All things of which we are aware are entirely contingent: they can exist without having to exist. In Avicenna's words: those things known to us are, considered in themselves, possible-of-existence (*mumkin al-wuǧūd*), but not necessary-of-existence (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*), since they have only come into existence because something else has caused them and thereby made them necessary.[27]

Upon this foundation, Avicenna elaborated his proof for God's existence, which can be summarised as follows: it is indisputable that something exists. From this follows that it is either (a.) possible-of-existence or (b.) necessary-of-existence. If (b.) applies, then our proof is concluded, since we have then found the necessary-of-existence, which carries the grounds for its existence in itself. If (a.) applies (which is in fact the case), this being is dependent on a cause, which makes its existence then necessary. However, it follows also for this cause that is either (a.) possible-of-existence or (b.) necessary-of-existence. That leads to analogous consequences: in the case of (b.), we would have found the necessary-of-existence. In the case of (a.), the cause depends, for its part, upon a further cause that makes its existence necessary. This intellectual operation can be repeated as often as desired. As long as it leads only to causes which, considered in themselves, are possible-of-existence, we cannot explain the fact that something exists. The causal chain cannot not simply consist of itself, neither by virtue of one of its elements nor by virtue of its totality. It comes about only when something external, which for its part is not only possible-of-existence, but necessary-of-existence, lends its existence necessity. Consequently, there is a necessary-of-existence, upon which all other being depends and which we designate God.[28]

5 Repercussions and transitions into the Latin Middle Ages: Thomas Aquinas

Avicenna's reflections had wide-reaching consequences. That begins already with the fact that the term 'necessary-of-existence' (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd*), which he coined, became one of the most frequently used names for God in the Islamic World. But his proof for God's existence also found broad agreement from philosophers as well as theologians. For the former, it was taken mostly as Avicenna intended, with the consequence that the effect of the necessary-of-existence (i. e. the world)

27 McGinnis 2010: 159–163.

28 Avicenna 2004a: 29–34; for an analysis of the argument see Goodman 2006: 63–68; McGinnis 2010: 163–168; Adamson 2013: 170–189.

existed along with the necessary-of-existence itself (i. e. God) from eternity. The theologians, in contrast, sought to avoid these consequences, and made the case further for a temporal origin of the world. To this end, they modified Avicenna's argumentation, and associated it with elements of the *kalām*-proof, a process that can be demonstrated, for example in the case of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (gest. 1111).[29]

Whatever was said in this regard however, as rule, it found its way from the Islamic World to Europe. Virtually all reflections that we have considered so far were received by Latin authors in the twelfth century, or the thirteenth at the latest. The modes of transition from the Arabic into the Latin tradition were various and variable. Much was known through the translation of Aristotle's books in Europe, or else through the translation of the works of Avicenna and Averroes (d. 1198). Latin authors were exposed to yet more when they became acquainted with Moses Maimonides's (d. 1204) magnum opus, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (*Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*), in which the Islamic theologians' image of the physical world and proof for the existence of God was described very precisely.[30] In the thirteenth century, there was also a thinker who surveyed the whole complex of problems and reordered it anew. Here, we are talking about Thomas Aquinas (d.1274), who took up the question of the proof of God's existence in several of his writings.

The most important presentation is found in the *Summa contra gentiles*[31] and the *Summa theologiae*.[32] From both deliberations, what comes out is that Thomas Aquinas recognised as cogent five ways (*quinque viae*) to demonstrate the existence of God rationally. Briefly summarised, they are the following: (1.) the argument from motion; (2.) the argument from the impossibility of an infinite chain of causes; (3.) the argument from being; (4.) the argument from degrees of perfection; and (5.) the proof from design.[33] This means that Thomas classified the arguments of Aristotle as well as the argument of Avicenna as reliable.[34] That had the consequence that they were further received not only in the Islamic World, but also in Europe. This would lead to many further discussions, as will now be shown.

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29 Rudolph 1997: 339–346.

30 Maimonides 1963: 194–226,

31 *Summa contra gentiles* I 13: *Rationes ad probandum Deum esse*

32 *Summa theologiae* I, quaestio 2, art. 3.

33 Latin text and German transl. of the relevant passages in: Thomas von Aquin 1987: 1: 40–59; a short summary of the arguments is given by Weischedel 1983 [1975]: 137–139.

34 The other two arguments deemed reliable by Thomas are based on reflections taken from the Platonic tradition (esp. Anselm of Canterbury) (argument 4) and from the Stoic tradition (argument 5).

6 The Ontological proof for God's existence and its relevance for the entangled history of Philosophy between Europe and the Islamic World

The various arguments for God's existence discussed so far mostly are cosmological arguments or arguments from the contingency of beings. They belong to the category '*a posteriori* proofs' which set out from something considered as already given in reality, from existing entities in the world. In these arguments, one infers from the existence of beings in the world to a necessary first cause of their existence. The same is true of the so-called *Teleological Argument* or *Argument from design*. But there is another type of argument which in contrast, doesn't commence with beings in the world, but with a concept constructed or explicated in such a way that it necessarily entails its real existence. This type is called '*a priori* argument' known also under the heading 'Ontological Argument'. Both categories are to be considered as ideal typical forms of proofs for God's existence. Concrete explications and formulations of an argument are often integrated forms of these categories.[35]

The ontological argument is relevant to our discussion for at least two reasons. For one thing, although in medieval Islamic philosophy the "a posteriori proof" seems to be dominant, there are also traces of a priori arguments which still remain to be reconstructed and evaluated in more detail. For another, particularly in contemporary discussions in the Islamic World, to which we shall turn shortly, the ontological proof also plays an important role.

7 Anselm of Canterbury: *Unum Argumentum*, Prototype of the Ontological Argument

Yet before we turn to the medieval as well as contemporary discussions of the Ontological Argument in an Islamic context, let us first consider the proof for God's existence developed by the late eleventh century cleric Anselm of Canterbury. His argument until today is regarded to represent the first elaborated

35 For a general overview of the various types of philosophical proofs for God's existence in Western intellectual history see Craig/Moreland 2009.

version of an *a priori* proof.[36] The argument purported to demonstrate the necessary existence of a 'supreme being' by way of pure reason alone (*sola ratione*), without recourse to experience. Anselm developed his argument in his *Proslogion* (Chap. 2–4).[37] As the title indicates, it is written in the style of a pious address or a form of prayer in which a believer explains to God the rational basis for his belief in Him. This points to the fact that Anselm did not articulate the argument merely as sophisticated thought experiment, but for the sake of assuring the rationality of his own belief in God. Then again, in the argument itself, he aims at constructing a proof that does not require any particular religious doctrine or tradition as its basis. The vantage point is rather an abstract concept of God which, in Anselm's understanding, would also convince an unbeliever to accept the necessity of the reality of God's existence. The famous phrase explicating this concept is as follows: '... we believe that thou art something than which nothing greater can be conceived' (*et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitare possit*). With this definition, Anselm aims at presenting a *concept* of God which defines God as an absolutely unsurpassable being and hence seeks to establish a definition of the idea of God that would be acceptable to anyone notwithstanding his/her believe in the real existence of such a supreme being. Drawing on this concept, he then argues that this very concept of God necessarily entails its real existence, so that anyone who understands the meaning of this definition would also have to come to the conclusion that God exists in reality. Anselm argues for this conclusion in a consecutive series of argumentative propositions which could be paraphrased as follows:

(1) The definition of the abstract idea of God that He must be 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived' can be accepted by even an unbeliever (or a fool, in Anselm's phrasing).
(2) Hence, this 'being' 'of which nothing greater can be conceived' exists in the mind / the understanding of believers and unbelievers alike.
(3) This being can also be conceived to exist in reality.
(4) Yet something which exists in understanding as well as in reality is obviously greater than something which exists in understanding alone.
(5) Hence, a 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived' in so far as it exists in understanding alone, would be inferior to such a 'something' that also exists in reality.

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36 For a brief general introduction to Anselm of Canterbury see Schönberger 2004.

37 For the Latin text of Proslogion II–IV see, for instance, Anselm of Canterbury 2005. For a discussion of the *Proslogion* see Logan 2009. This book also contains an English translation of the text, see Logan 2009: 25–88.

(6) This, however, would be a conceptual contradiction, since on the conceptual level nothing can be conceived greater than 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived'.
(7) It follows that 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived' must exist in reality.

This argument, which we have presented here only briefly and schematically, has – since Anselm first enunciated it – often been criticised, rejected, refined and re-formulated.[38] Advocates of an *a priori* proof who draw in some way on Anselm's argument include, for instance, Bonaventura (1221–1274) and Duns Scotus (1266–1308) in the thirteenth century, as well as Descartes and Leibniz in the Early Modern period, although one can argue that the latter two actually advocated a version of the proof that integrates the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* approaches.[39]

8 Avicenna's argument from being as an "a priori" argument and the post-classical (thirteenth – eighteenth century) *Iṯbāt Wāǧib al-Wuǧūd* Genre (Proof of the necessary existent)

Although Anselm's argument is usually regarded as the prototypical *a priori* argument, in the Islamic World we find attempts at an *a priori* argument predating Anselm. Avicenna's concept of God as the 'necessary-of-existence by itself' (*wāǧib al-wuǧūd fī nafsihī*), as he particularly points out in his last philosophical summa *al-Išārāt wa l-tanbīhāt* (Pointers and Reminders), is explicitly *a priori*, in that it is a concept the negation of which would be a logical contradiction. Such a concept, following Avicenna, must be conceived to exist in reality as well as in the mind.[40] Avicenna even states that this argument, which he refers to as the arguments of the philosophers, is superior to the cosmological argument of the theologians since it infers from cause to effect, i. e. from the

38 The literature evaluating Anselm's proof is immense, for a bibliographical overview see, for instance, Bromand/Kreis 2011: 674–678.
39 On the reformulation of the Ontological Argument in Descartes and Leibnitz see, Harrelson 2009; also instructive on Descartes version: Cramer 1996.
40 For the most prominent passage in which Avicenna discusses this argument in his *Išārāt wa-t-tanbihāt* see Avicenna 2004b: 3: 26–80.

concept of God to the world. One may therefore argue that in his proof for Gods existence, Avicenna 'anticipates' Anselm in so far as he also begins his argument with a rational concept, yet in contrast to Anselm, he does not conclude his argument with a merely *a priori* way of reasoning.[41]

Despite the importance he gave to his argument, Avicenna did not elaborate it in any of his works as an independent comprehensive treatise of its own but presents versions of his proof at various points in his major works on metaphysics and epistemology. Nevertheless, many succeeding generations of philosophers, particularly in the broader Iranian context commented upon these various versions of Avicenna's Argument, in commentaries and specific works and they further developed and refined his arguments. As a consequence, between the thirteenth and eighteenth century, a genre of philosophical treatises emerged, known as "Proof of the Necessary Existent" (*Iṯbāt wāǧib al-wuǧūd*). Such works attended to both "a priori" as well as "a posteriori" aspects of Avicenna's proof and its refinement by subsequent scholars. The vast majority of these treatises written in Arabic and Persian have been neither edited nor examined by scholars. Yet this material contains most intriguing discussions of the philosophical proof that would be worthwhile to integrate into a more comprehensive entangled history of arguments for God's existence.[42]

9 Philosophical proofs for God's existence: Between the Western and the Islamic World in twentieth century philosophy

At this point, we turn to the entangled history of the proof for God's existence between Europe and the Middle East in the twentieth / twenty-first century. This should not suggest that in the post-classical period we don't find any relevant philosophical interactions between the West and the Islamic World. As has been mentioned earlier, this mutual exchange of ideas is an ever present phenomenon. Yet, as the example of the post-classical treatises indicates, particularly with regard to the period after Averroes until the nineteenth century, the scholarly assessment of Islamicate intellectual History, its relations to European thinking and the edition – let alone evaluation – of the various source

41 On the discussion of the a priori character of Avicenna's proof see Mayer 2001.

42 For a brief study and edition of one of these treatises see Saatchiayan 2011. For a selective list of such treatises see Saatchiayan 2011: 100–104.

texts and intellectual currents remains in its infancy. In the modern period, however, we again have clear evidence for philosophical interactions on the proof for God's existence between the Islamic World and Europe or more generally, the West.

But, one might ask, are philosophical arguments for God's existence still relevant to Western philosophical discourses in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? Would anyone seriously attempt to prove the reality of God's existence by way of philosophical reasoning? Have we not entrusted any rational discourse about God to theologians as experts on questions related to transcendence? The answer is no: the question of God has always been and continues to be a fundamental theme in philosophy, and the issue of the reality of His existence is still discussed today.[43] The Ontological Argument, for instance, is debated particularly in the context of Analytic Philosophy and logic.[44] Examples which may already count as modern classics are the discussions of Kurt Gödel (d. 1978), Norman Malcolm (d. 1990), David Lewis (d. 2001) and Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932).[45] Likewise, the Cosmological Argument has been reconsidered in the twentieth century, often drawing on the achievements of modern science.[46] It may be the case that many of these attempts to revive the philosophical proofs are motivated by the theistic stance of the scholars who put them forward, yet this doesn't mean that they claim validity in the realm of theology or philosophy of religion only. They decisively articulate truth claims in the realms of logic, ontology and epistemology.

Turning now to the Islamic World today, a theistic mindset across all intellectual discourses seems not only apparent but even dominant. It may therefore seem fairly unsurprising that in Iran arguments for God's existence are quite a

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43 For more recent synopses of various philosophical arguments for God's existence see Craig/Moreland 2009; Bromand/Kreis 2011, this is an anthology with excerpts of particular arguments, thematic introductions by the editors and a comprehensive bibliography. For a concise introduction to the various arguments and their critics see Müller 2001. Examples for a modern contemporary systematic engagement with the philosophical proof in general are discussed in Buchheim et al 2012; see also Ricken 1991.

44 For discussions of the Ontological Proof in analytical Philosophy see in particular Plantinga 1965. For further modern discussions of the Ontological Proof see Henrich 1960; Röd 1992; more recent Hiltscher 2006; Hiltscher 2008; Dombrowski 2006.

45 For these classics, besides discussions and summaries in thematic edited volumes mentioned in the footnotes above, see particularly Plantinga 1974; Gödel 1995: 3: 403–404; for a very recent refinement of Gödel's proof and a claim for its validity based on an automated theorem prover assessment within computational metaphysics see Benzmüller/Woltzenlogel Paleo 2016: 939–942.

46 For the cosmological proof see Craig 1980. For the modern re-reading of the argument see below Section 12.

common issue in philosophical debates. Yet one has to be cautious here: to infer an explanation for the presence of arguments for God's existence in philosophical debates directly from the environment of a theocratic state or the religious character of a given society is, if not a fallacy, at least an epistemic short circuit. In other regions of the Islamic World in which religiosity may play a similar role, arguments for God's existence do not appear to be a central topic in contemporary philosophical debates. The reason for the strong persistence of discussions around the argument in Iran lies mainly in the fact that Iran has a strong and continuous philosophical tradition of ontological Realism, into which various strands of Islamic Philosophy are synthesised. What is meant here is the philosophical System of Ṣadr ad-Dīn al-Šīrāzī – known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640) – who was a contemporary of René Descartes and is celebrated as the figurehead of an authentic national philosophical tradition in today's Iran.[47] For Ṣadrā the concept of being has priority over every other concept (such as essence or quiddity) and being at the same time represents the totality of Reality. Yet Ṣadrā does not advocate an absolute monism that would disallow any distinction between concrete beings (things and creatures in the world) and absolute necessary being (God). In order to stick to the idea of being as comprising the entirety of reality on the one hand, and diversity among beings on the other, he elaborates the idea of analogical 'Gradation of being' (*taškīk*), a technical term first introduced by Avicenna.[48] Hence, according to Ṣadrā, every entity receives its existence from the one pure and absolute Being, so that they are all connected with the same Being, yet are different from each other according to the grade or intensity of being they receive from absolute Being. It is this gradual relationship that grants existence to every entity yet on a different grade of being. Mullā Ṣadrā compares this to the various intensity of daylight and brightness all coming from the same source but varying in grade. Drawing on this ontological system he also contributed to the above mentioned tradition of the "Proof of the Necessary Existent". Given the continuous popularity of his philosophy in Iran, arguments for the existence of God are also relevant in contemporary philosophical debates in Iran. Furthermore, because it is an abstract concept of God that is central to these debates, the ontological argument is of crucial importance, but arguments from design as well as cosmological arguments are also to be found in these discussions.[49]

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47 For an overview to Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical system see Rahman 1975. For his works and his relevance in Iran see Rizvi 2007.

48 On Mullā Ṣadrā's Ontology see Rizvi 2009.

49 For a contemporary discussions see for instance Āyatollāhy 2005.

In what follows, we are going to present two examples for contemporary discussions on the philosophical proof for God's existence in order to illustrate particular instances which demonstrate the intellectual entanglement of philosophical discourses on this topic between Europe and the Islamic World in the twentieth century. The fist example will be a discussion of the Ontological Argument brought forward by a contemporary Iranian thinker, a discussion that can be considered representative of a specific strand of metaphysical discourse in Iran. The second example will briefly point to a reception of a cosmological argument from medieval Islamic thought in contemporary western philosophy.

What is intriguing about the ontological argument philosophically speaking is perhaps less the attempt to actually prove the existence of a supreme being in reality, a divine creator, but rather – and more generally – the attempt to enquire into the very possibility of inferring from pure reason, from a mental concept only, to real, extra-mental existence. This intellectual challenge immediately leads to the main problems of theoretical philosophy: from an ontological perspective, the question of the very meaning of 'being' comes up, as well as the issue of whether there are various types of 'existence' (for instance mental, real, possible, necessary) to be differentiated; epistemologically, one has to ask how we can have knowledge about/of existence. Furthermore, one has to inquire into the relation between the processes of conceptualisation in the mind and the access of a knowing subject to reality.

10 Immanuel Kant: Critique of the Ontological Argument

The issue of the transition from a (mental) concept to real, extra-mental existence is the striking point of the Ontological Argument and it was criticised already by contemporaries of Anselm, as the so called Anselm-Gaunilo debate demonstrates.[50] Also, Thomas Aquinas, who himself provided five ways to prove the existence of God, rejected Anselm's argument as invalid.[51] The most influential critique of the *a priori* proof, however, was articulated by Immanuel Kant. It was he who introduced – although targeting Descartes and Leibnitz'

50 For the Anselm-Gaunilo Debate see Anselm of Canterbury/Gaunilo of Marmoutiers 1989.

51 For Thomas Aquinas' critique of Anselm see, for instance, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*; see also Cosgrove 1974: 513–530.

reformulation of the proof, rather than Anselm's original argument – the designation 'Ontological Argument' for this particular *a priori* approach.

Kant developed his critique in the *Transcendental Dialectics* of his *Critique of Pure Reason*. In short, he raises two objections against the ontological argument: (1) Being is not a real predicate. Hence, it cannot be part of the concept of a thing. According to Kant, a real predicate must broaden/expand/add something to the concept of a thing. Existence, however, does not broaden the concept because the mental representation of a thing doesn't change regardless of the fact that it exists in reality or not. Therefore, it is inherently impossible to deduce the real existence of an entity from its concept, since it is not part of the concept in the first place; (2) Even in the case that one assumes existence to be a necessary component of the concept of God, what follows from this necessity would remain on the conceptual level, i. e. within an analytical judgement. Yet, from an analytical judgement, one can never derive the real existence of an entity. In other words: the necessary existence of God in reality would only be given in the case that God exists. This judgement is – as Kant points out – by no means a proof, but rather nothing more than a tautology. Existential propositions – he further agues – are always synthetic and never analytical. Yet it is only in the case of analytical judgements that a negation of the predicate leads to contradiction, not in the case of synthetic judgements. Since it was the crucial point of the Ontological Argument that a denial of God's existence in reality would cause such a contradiction, the argument, according to Kant, is invalid.[52]

Kant's critique of the ontological argument, and of any attempt to prove God's existence via theoretical reasoning, has undoubtedly led to a fundamental shift in philosophical theology. Whoever takes up the task of arguing for the possibility that God's existence can be established via theoretical reasoning will necessarily have to deal with Kant's critique in order to refute his arguments. It is thus not surprising that Kant's refutation of rational theology has also been discussed among thinkers who follow the tradition(s) of Islamic Philosophy. For them, Kant's critical philosophy – in so far as they really engaged with it – constituted a fundamental challenge, precisely because it was Kant's aim to refute the epistemological foundations of traditional metaphysics which were also central to Islamic Philosophy. Kant's main epistemological coup was a theoretical shift to transcendental subjectivism in the theory of knowledge. Turning away from classical ontology, Kant investigates the conditions of possibility of knowledge shared by every knowing subject. Attributes that hitherto

52 For Kant's Critique of the ontological argument see Kant 2010: A 592/B 620–A 602/B 630. See also Sala 1989.

were treated as objective properties of things in the world, he explained to be rather properties of human cognition.[53]

For the history of the philosophical argument for God's existence between Europe and the Islamic World in the twentieth century, thinkers who faced this challenge and who were familiar with both the classical arguments from Islamic philosophy and their further developments, as well as with the European philosophical tradition, are of particular significance. Precisely because these thinkers, in their attempts to re-establish the Ontological Argument, did not only engage with post-Avicennan but also with post-Kantian discourses, their discussions constitute a highly interesting case of appropriating Western philosophy.

11 Mahdī Hā'irī Yazdī: A critique of Kant's Critique

A significant example for this discourse is Mahdī Ḥā'irī Yazdī's discussion of the argument for God's existence. In the following discussion, we will not focus primarily on Ḥā'irīs own attempt to provide a valid proof, which – drawing largely on Mullā Ṣadrā – combines an *a priori* and *a posteriori* approach. We will concentrate rather on his critique of Kant's critique of the Ontological Argument. Mahdī Ḥā'irī Yazdī, who – after receiving a traditional religious education in a shiite seminary – earned a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in 1979, was exceptional with regard to his first-hand access to western philosophy among Iranian *'ulamā'* trained in Islamic Philosophy at that time. His writings indeed show a considerable acquaintance with the 'Western' texts he deals with. He follows a comparative approach in philosophy which, retaining a schematic dichotomy between Western and Islamic Philosophy however, is dominated by the attempt to demonstrate the superiority of Islamic philosophy, especially in terms of metaphysics and epistemology. Yet within particular discussions of philosophical argumentations, he shows a considerable sense for stimulating critical assessments of Western Philosophers. This includes his evaluation of Kant's theoretical philosophy.[54]

In his refutation of Kant's critique of the ontological proof, Ḥā'irī refers to both basic objections of Kant's critique mentioned above. Beyond that, in his argumentation, he is not merely concerned with exploring rational ways of

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53 Kant develops his theory of knowledge in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in particular in the section 'Transzendentale Analytik'. The literature on Kant's theory of knowledge and his so called Copernican Revolution is immeasurable. A useful guide to his *KrV* is Mohr/Willaschek 1998.

54 For Ḥā'irī Yazdī and his significance in twentieth century Iranian philosophy see, Hajatpour 2005; Seidel 2014: 99–105.

proving God, but also with re-establishing a broader concept of being, which – following Mullā Ṣadrā – comprises the totality of reality and is hence much broader than Kant's understanding of existence.

One group of objections brought forward by Ḥā'irī is directed against Kant's claim that being (*Sein*) is not a real predicate. According to Ḥā'irī, this claim is untenable and he accuses Kant of being inaccurate in constructing his argument. In what follows, we will look at only two of his objections in this regard: the first objection concerns the correct understanding of the term 'real predicate'. Ḥā'irī partly follows Kant's argument that being is not a real predicate, namely in the sense that being does not broaden the concept of a thing.[55] But in another sense, he further argues, an extension in regard to the concept does take place: not for the concept itself but for the knowledge about the concept. It is the knowledge that there really is a corresponding object to the concept in the extra-mental world. This knowledge about the concept's real existence, however, is not part of the concept itself but, like the concept, is a mental phenomenon or – as Ḥā'irī puts it referring to Mullā Ṣadrā – a mental being (*wuǧūd-i ẕihnī*).[56] Therefore, he concludes, being can indeed be regarded as a real predicate.

The second objection concerns the role of being in judgements. Kant, Ḥā'irī argues, effectively treats being simply as if it were nothing other than a copula, connecting subject and predicate. In so doing, he further says, Kant ignores important differentiations within the concept of being as well as between different types of judgements. Hā'irī dedicates an extensive discussion to these differentiations and classifications, which cannot be discussed in detail here.[57] He basically attempts to explain the difference between existential propositions and other propositions: the proposition 'x exists' is an existential proposition and thus – here he agrees with Kant – a synthetic judgement. Yet what Kant – according to Ḥā'irī – misses in his argument is the fact that predication within existential propositions is of a completely different kind than that within synthetic judgements composed of three components, such as 'x is y'. Ḥā'irī argues that Kant, in his famous catchphrase from the 'Transcendental Dialectics' of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, which says that 'being is merely the copula or the position of a thing with all its predicates in relation to an object',[58] essentially

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55 Ḥā'irī Yazdī 2006: 17–18, 34–35, 159; Ḥā'irī Yazdī 2005a: 333–334.

56 Hā'erī Yazdī 1981: 18–19, 35–36.; Ḥā'irī Yazdī 2005a: 211–212; 334–335.

57 For Ḥā'irīs discussion of the various sub-concepts of beining his, Ḥā'irī Yazdī 2005b. For a brief summary of his positions see, Hajatpour 2005; Seidel 2014: 100–02; 171–173 (with further references to Ḥā'irī's discussion on the concept of being).

58 Kant 2010: A 598–599/B 626–627. For Ḥā'irī's paraphrasing of the passage see Ḥā'irī Yazdī 2005a: 203–204.

displays every existential proposition in the form of a three-component proposition: 'x is this object'. He thereby reduces 'being' in predication to a mere copula and eclipses its function as a real predicate. This, following Ḥāʾirī, is unsound because 'object' (Gegenstand) means nothing other than concretion of a concept in the world, hence it is 'concrete being' (*wuǧūd-i ʿaynī*) that is predicated of the concept. By simply substituting 'predicative being' (*wuǧūd-i maḥmūlī*) with 'object' (the Persian/Arabic term he uses here is *miṣdāq*)[59] one cannot possibly equate the essential distinction between existential proposition and other propositions composed of three components.[60]

Ḥāʾirī also raises a second group of objections related to the concept of God itself in that it is directed against Kant's argument that God's necessary, real existence is not deducible from the concept of God. He agrees with Kant that from an analytical judgement one cannot deduce any necessity of existence, which means that existential propositions must be synthetic.[61] Yet he rejects Kant's opinion that existence can only be proved *a posteriori*, i. e. exclusively through experience, in other words that only objects of the world of senses (intuition/*Anschauung*) can be proved to be existent. According to Ḥāʾirī's understanding of being, there are far more spheres of real being than merely the world of possible experience. Precisely because God does not belong to the sphere of sense perception, his existence, based on Kant's presuppositions, cannot possibly be proven. Ḥāʾirī argues thus that Kant's rejection of the ontological argument is constructed faultily in the first place, because he first fallaciously reduces being only to the sphere of possible experience and then misleadingly constructs a hypothetical argument in which God is treated as if he would belong to this sphere. The argument must therefore necessarily fail.[62]

This brief discussion of Ḥāʾirī's rejection of Kant's critique of the ontological argument does not reconstruct his line of argumentation in detail and it is not included here to evaluate whether or not Ḥāʾirī's rejection is valid.[63] Here, our discussion is focussed rather on the fact that Ḥāʾirī obviously operates with a much more comprehensive concept of being than the one Kant uses. Hence, Ḥāʾirī's critique that Kant seems to be incapable of thinking beyond empiricism regarding the issue of existence is not unjustified, since for Kant, the idea of

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59 Literally "something that verifies something (in reality, in Extension)", a verifier.

60 See Ḥāʾirī Yazdī 2006: 154–157.

61 See Ḥāʾirī Yazdī 2005a: 331–337; 364–365; Ḥāʾirī Yazdī 2006: 164–167.

62 See Ḥāʾirī Yazdī 2005a: 215–217.

63 For a more detailed, although not exhaustive discussion of Ḥāʾirī's critical evaluation of Kant's critique of the Ontological Argument see, Seidel 2007: 41–60; Seidel 2010: 689–696); Seidel 2014: 171–190.

existence is indeed and by definition connected to something sensible. Kant explicitly binds being/existence to objects of experience, precisely because in his subjectivist epistemological turn, he was concerned with the question as to how human cognition would be capable of conceiving of perceived sense data *as* objects (*Gegenstände*) of experience. Hence being (of things) must be bound to experience.[64]

For Ḥāʾirī, this line of argument requires an unjustifiable reduction and even degradation of the concept of being. Ḥāʾirī's emphasis on a broader notion of being becomes plausible when we take his metaphysical perspective into account. He advocates – similar to Mullā Ṣadrā – an ontological realism, which is meant to guarantee, in contrast to the Kantian theory of knowledge, a cognitive access to entities as they are in reality. These entities are not merely objects that emerge in the world of experience. Other fields of being likewise belong to this reality, such as the contents of consciousness, as 'mental beings' (*wuǧūd-i ẕihnī*), metaphysical entities, such as universals (*kullī*) and of course the totality of being (*muṭlaq-i wuǧūd*) and all-encompassing, necessary being: God. All particular contingent entities are graded aspects of this totality and existent only in dependence to the necessary being.

We leave the question open whether Ḥāʾirī's arguments against Kant are philosophically convincing. From a systematic point of view, however, they entail critical assessments and ideas that are in one way or another also discussed in contemporary Western Kant studies[65] or in the context of new approaches to ontology.[66] Beyond that, Ḥāʾirī's critical evaluation of Kant's critique of the ontological argument is relevant with regard to the entangled intellectual history of Europe and the Islamic world. To mention the fact that Ḥāʾirī was acquainted with both the Islamic as well as the western tradition of philosophy is by no means superficial observation when it comes to his particular way of philosophising. He does not only apply Mullā Ṣadrā in order to read Kant, he also integrates contemporary readings of Ṣadrā as well as post-Kantian discourses of ontology, such as quantifier logic, Russelian description theory and Meinongian theory of Objects into his discussion.[67] For a proper evaluation of his discourse, one would also have to take these conceptual contexts and

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64 Kant's theory of objects (their perception and mental construction) is a central aspect of his transcendental subjectivist turn in epistemology. It is already indicated in his introduction to the 2nd edition of his *Citique of pure Reason* see Kant, *KrV* B XVIII. For a discussion of the reception of Kant's theory of object perception in Iran (with references to both Iranian and Western Kant literature) see Seidel 2014: 191–258.

65 See, for instance, Rohs 2001: 214–228; Willaschek 2001: 2: 679–690.

66 See, for instance, Gabriel 2015: 189–199.

67 See Ḥāʾirī Yazdī 2006: 68–94.

their adaptation by Ḥāʾirī into account. Beyond that political and ideological contexts also play an influential role for Ḥāʾirī's discourse and its reception in contemporary Iran. It is important to be aware of the fact that in post-revolutionary Iran an ideological reading of Mullā Ṣadra became dominant, which in the end was also meant to justify the theocratic doctrine of the *wilāyat-i faqīh*.[68] It is against this ideological background, which in contemporary Iranian Comparative Philosophy often takes the form of apologetics against an allegedly western Idealism, that it is said to challenge what is treated as original Islamic Metaphysics. This also had an impact on Ḥāʾirī's writings and their perception: whereas many of his theoretical writings, to which we have alluded so far, were used as textbooks in philosophy classes at university and in the religious seminaries, his book on political philosophy *Ḥikmat wa Ḥukūmat* in which he, though indirectly, refers to Kant's practical philosophy rather affirmatively, was prohibited in Iran and therefore printed abroad.[69]

Having discussed the example of Ḥāʾirī's critique of Kant's rejection of the ontological argument and having just referred to the phenomenon of apologetic comparison as well as the ideological reading of Ṣadrian ontology, we want call for particular caution not to jump to seemingly obvious conclusions and to avoid epistemic short circuits. The dominance of apologetic comparison in philosophy does not suggest that every critical reading of, for instance, Kant is an ideologically motivated total rejection of his thought. Ḥāʾirī is rather an example of a critical, though serious, engagement with Kant. Furthermore, the example of Ḥāʾirī should also not imply that in Iran we only find refutations of Kant. To the contrary – and this is true also to other regions in the Islamic World – we also find positions sharing central doctrines of Kant's critical philosophy, for instance those emphasising the limitations of human cognition and hence dismissing the possibility of any theoretical proof of God's existence. In these discussions, in which reference is likewise made to both Western and Islamic Philosophy, the question of what it means for the human to reflect about God and the relationship between the human and the transcendent gains particular importance. Within these discussions the issue of God is, hence, transferred to the realm of *practical* philosophy.[70] Yet because these discussions do not belong to the problem of a *theoretical* proof of God's existence, we will not discuss them further here.

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68 On the ideological reading see Seidel 2014: 330–334.

69 See Hāʾerī Yazdī 1995. For a discussion of this work see Hajatpour 2002.

70 For an example of such discussion in the Iranian context, see Seidel 2012: 137–158; Seidel 2014: 286–319.

12 Modern Philosophical Theism: The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument

Before concluding this enquiry we would like to consider an *a posteriori* argument for the existence of God in relation to both the West and the Islamic World. With the following example moreover, we change perspectives in terms of the direction of the reception processes. Obviously, not only Western philosophy has been appropriated and discussed in modern Islamic contexts, there has also been a reception of Islamic Philosophy in modern philosophical discourses in the West. In modern attempts to re-establish the validity of philosophical arguments for God's existence, we find thinkers advocating a particular re-reformulation of the Cosmological Argument. This version is known as 'The *Kalām* Cosmological Argument' or, KCA.[71] This designation is explained by the fact that the proponents of this argument refer it back to the twelfth century Sunni theologian and polymath al-Ġazālī, a major figure in *kalām* (rational Theology), Islamic Mysticism and Philosophy. Al-Ġazālī has often been portrayed as a staunch critic of philosophy as such, yet a more accurate description would be that he was a philosophical critic of the Aristotelian and Avicennian tradition.[72] A primary objective of his famous work *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) is precisely a philosophical critique of the capacities of human cognition. Among other things, we find a refutation of the doctrine of the eternity of the world, which incidentally contains a highly inspiring argument for the idealism of time perception.[73] The doctrine of the creation of the world plays a decisive role in Ġazālī's argument for God's existence as the basis for establishing the necessity of its creator. The argument can be described through the following syllogism: (1) Everything that comes into existence has a cause; (2) The world came into existence; (3) Therefore the World has a cause.

Obviously, the crucial task in order for this syllogism to be valid is to prove the second premise. However, our purpose in bringing up this example was not to provide a detailed discussion of the proof but rather to draw attention to a number of curious peculiarities.[74] The modern proponents of this argument, such as William Lane Craig (b. 1949), when drawing on this basic syllogism do refer to al Ġazālī, yet in their own argumentations and their discussions of the

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71 The most outstanding proponent of this argument is Craig, see Craig 1979.

72 For Ġazālī and philosophy see Griffel 2009; Griffel 2013: 289–313.

73 For a brief yet instructive summary of this argument see Flasch 2008: 141–158.

74 For a discussion of the proof see Nowacki 2007. For a critique of the argument see Sobel 2004: 168–237. For W.L. Craigs reply on that criticism see Craig 2006: 565–584.

second premise, Ġazālī doesn't seem to play any particular role. Instead they refer rather to Aristotle's arguments from the impossibility of an infinite causal chain, arguments from the philosophy of mathematics (such as Bolzano, Moore, Hilbert) and arguments form natural science (such as the Big Bang Theory). Yet it would, of course, be appropriate and inspiring also to explore in what way Ġazālī's own arguments could impinge on this discourse or whether they may be further developed from a systematic perspective, yet it is striking that in most reference works and historical synopses of the philosophical proof for God's existence, the so-called *Kalām Cosmological Argument* is mentioned, whereas Ġazālī's own argument is usually missing. This is also the case with Avicenna's argument, which, as we have seen, was highly influential in both the Islamic World and the 'West'.[75] From the perspective of an entangled Intellectual History this can no longer be satisfactory.

13 Conclusion

The philosophical proof for God's existence constitutes – as has been shown in our above enquiry – a shared philosophical problematic between the West and the Islamic world. Discussions on the question of whether we can establish a supreme being or primary principle of existence from Aristotle to the present have constantly circulated, being refined, rejected and modified between these two geographical areas. Hence, a clear cut and apodictic distinction between Western and Islamic philosophy, though sometimes useful for pragmatic reasons, is, if we approach the history of philosophy from the angle of the history of (particular) philosophical problems, inappropriate. It eclipses important transregional aspects of the history of thought and results in an inaccurate historical picture of a certain problematic. We therefore emphasise the importance of an entangled history of philosophy and similar approaches, such as global intellectual history.[76] This is necessary not only for the sake of giving a voice to the marginalised, non-European/non-Western protagonists of rational thought, moreover, the very narrative of the history of philosophy will remain distorted if told from a Eurocentric perspective only. One may still ask whether this refinement of the narrative really matters a great deal or whether it merely adds a handful of incidental historical

75 For one of the few publications in a European Language which discusses Proofs for the Existence of God with Reference to both the 'Western' and the 'Islamic' tradition from a comparative perspective see the conference proceedings Kanzian/Legenhausen 2008.

76 For a discussion of this approach see Moyn/Sartori 2013.

details. Is it of any contemporary relevance to broaden the scope in this way? Why should historians of ideas dealing with European thought not leave these details to the respective experts in area studies and concentrate on their own material? The answer is this: because the phenomenon of entanglement makes clear that, at least with regard to the Islamic World, the idea of pure 'European thought' separable from non-European is a fictional construct. Furthermore, an awareness of this entanglement also points to the fact that any reconstruction of the History of Philosophy belongs to the realm of contemporary 'knowledge production'. It is always embedded in a discourse with repercussions for questions of identity, determining in what way we today understand 'ourselves' as, for instance, Europeans or Westerners or subjects of a liberal and pluralistic society or rather of a particular ethnic group. Such identification often functions via a distinction from other societies and with reference to intellectual and cultural origins. In a time in which public discourse predominantly focusses on the Islamic World or on people from that region, it is no doubt also socially relevant to take the entangled history of thought between Europe and the Islamic World into account, in order to create an appropriate historical awareness and to call the peculiar ideological borders between an alleged 'us' and 'them' into question.

Beyond this, the entangled history of the philosophical proof of the existence of God also matters in the context of contemporary systematic philosophical discourses. In the above discussion of Ḥāʾirī, for instance, we argued that he criticises Kant from the perspective on an ontological Realism, quite influential in Iran. In the European context, a new interest in re-reading philosophical Realism –known under the heading 'New Realism' or 'Speculative Realism' – has emerged in recent years and likewise criticises Kant's epistemological system.[77] A comparative philosophical enquiry which engages with the arguments and texts of both intellectual contexts could be a highly stimulating endeavour. In order to be well equipped for such a project, a fair knowledge of the entangled history of shared philosophical problematics between Europe and the Islamic world is required. This awareness would enable us to open up new intellectual horizons and to refine and expand the Grand Narrative of an entangled Philosophical History.

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77 On the current of 'Speculative Realism' and its Critique of Kant see Bryant/Srnicek/Graham 2011; On 'New Realism' see, for instance, Gabriel 2014.

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