

Texts for talk on Avicenna's theory of compound meanings (Hodges, Copenhagen Sep 2016)

Text A. Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī, *Risāla* 4 on Universals 154.17–20 on the three kinds of existence.

Also existence (*wujūd*) is an equivocal noun which signifies different meanings. The first is the natural existence, which is the existence of the meanings in matter and together with accidents. The second is the logical existence, which is the existence of the meanings as forms in the soul. The third is the essential, which is called 'metaphysical', and it is the existence of the meanings according to how their definitions signify them. (Trans. Hodges.)

Text B. Avicenna *Madḳal* 15.1–12 on the two modes of existence.

The quiddities of things may exist in the real instances of things or in conception. They will thus have three aspects: [(a)] a consideration of the quiddity inasmuch as it is that quiddity, without being related to either of the two [kinds] of existents, and what attaches to it inasmuch as it is such; [(b)] a consideration thereof inasmuch as it is in external reality, where there will then attach to it accidents proper to this existence it has; [(c)] a consideration thereof inasmuch as it is in conception, where there will then attach to it accidents proper to this existence, for example, being a subject, predication, and like universality and particularity in predication, essentiality and accidentality in predication, and other things that you will learn [in this book]. For in external things there is no essentiality or accidentality by way of predication, no [such thing as] a thing's being a subject nor its being a predicate, no [such thing as] premise or syllogism, or anything of the sort. If we want to think about things and know them, we need necessarily to include them in conception, whereupon the states (*aḥwāl*) [peculiar] to conception will [necessarily] occur to them. We will thus necessarily need to consider the states that belong to them in conception, particularly when through cogitation we seek the apprehension of unknown things, this taking place by means of things that are known. (Trans. Marmura [3] pp. 10–12.)

Text C. Avicenna *Madḳal* 21.17–22.12 on compounds and features of their components.

Knowledge of simple components has two aspects, namely knowledge of them as prepared for the aforementioned composition to be made out of them, and knowledge of them as natures and things to which that meaning happens. An example of this is a house which is constructed from wood and other things. Its constructor needs to know about the simple components of the house, which are the wood, the bricks and the clay. But the wood, the bricks and the clay have features (*aḥwāl*) which make them sound for the house and the construction, and they have other features beside these. . . . Thus the builder does need to know whether the wood is firm or soft, and whether it is sound or worm-eaten, among other things. Likewise the art of logic doesn't examine whether simple [meanings] have one of the forms of existence, i.e. in the world or in the mind, nor does it investigate the quiddities of the things as quiddities, but rather as predicates and subjects and universals and particulars, and other things that happen to these meanings, from the aspect that we spoke of earlier. (Trans. Hodges.)

Text D. Avicenna, *Madḳal* 65.11–19 on indifference of essence.

Animal in itself is a meaning, regardless of whether it exists in external reality or is conceived in the soul. In itself it is neither general nor particular. If it were in itself general, so that animality by reason of being animality is general, it would follow necessarily that there would be no individual animal; rather, every animal would be general. If, moreover, animal by virtue of being animal were individual, it would then be impossible for it to be anything but one individual, that individual required by animality, and it would be impossible for any other individual to be an animal. Rather, animal in itself is something conceived in the mind as animal and in accordance with its conception as animal it is simply animal. If with this it is [also] conceived as general, particular and the like, then an idea additional to its being animal, occurring accidentally to animality, is conceived with it. (Trans. Marmura [3] p. 49.)

Text E. Avicenna *ʿIbāra* 31.16–32.2 on kinds of compound.

Two kinds of compound are useful in the sciences. One is where the compounding is by restriction. This occurs when we acquire a concept by definitions, descriptions and the like. The other is compounding by comment (*kabar*). This occurs when we achieve assent through syllogisms and the like. This [second] kind of composition gives rise to a kind of phrase called a declarative [sentence]. (Trans. Hodges.)

Text F. Avicenna *ʿIbāra* 48.12–49.2 applying indifference of essence and quantifiers.

It is not because your subject is universal that the judgment you pronounce on it becomes universal, as far as you do not judge that [the predicate] belongs or does not belong to the whole of [this subject]. And if you did not judge this way, then you have judged on the nature posed for the generality [and it] alone. But this nature, taken in itself, is something; taken as general, it is another thing; and taken as particular, it is again another thing. In itself, it is suited to be considered both ways, for if it were not suited for the particularity, it would not be suited to be for example a unique humanity in virtue of which Zayd is a unique man; and if it were not suited to be general in the mind, it would not be such as many associate in it. (Trans. Hasnawi [2])

Text G. Avicenna *Qiyās* iii.2, 145.5–148.2, on taking ‘as *M*’ in the subject or in the predicate.

You already know that some white-coloured things are animals with necessity. And [you know] that animal is not just temporarily denied of white-coloured insofar as (*min haythu*) it is white-coloured, a denial which would make it correct that sometimes white-coloured insofar as it is white-coloured is animal and sometimes it is not; you are already aware of this. So every white-coloured thing has denied of it—so long as its essence continues to be satisfied—being an animal insofar as it is white-coloured. ... When we say “insofar as it is white-coloured”, if it is a part of the predicate, then what happens is what we said just now and in the earlier discussion. If it is a part of the subject, then either its as if you said

- (1) the white-coloured which is taken insofar as it is white-coloured

under the condition of abstraction, or its as if you said (1) not under the condition of abstraction and not with any other addition. If (1) is meant under the condition of abstraction, then it is not possible for [the thing that is white-coloured insofar as it is white-coloured] to be X, where X is any other meaning. In this case there are two meanings: the meaning of the essence in itself, and a meaning which it has so long as it continues to fit this description. The denial together with this description is not necessary in an absolute sense. But [in the meaning of] the essence itself, things are denied of it permanently and for all time. In the other case, i.e. where white-coloured is taken not on condition of abstraction, but without any condition, other conditions might be attached to it; in this case ... it is false to say

- (2) The human, insofar as he is a thing fitting the description white-coloured, has animality denied of him.

The difference between the two ways of interpreting [these sentences] is that the investigation of white-coloured without consideration ... just refers to the thing being white-coloured—it could be plaster of Paris or snow or something else. [By contrast] the enquiry into white-coloured interpreted as being under the condition of abstraction can be described as an enquiry into the white-coloured insofar as it is white-coloured, and it is an enquiry into white-coloured where it is excluded that it is plaster of Paris or a whiteness or that it has another form of existence beyond its being just white-coloured. When white-coloured is taken in this way, animal is denied of it, and it is correct to say

- (3) The white-coloured, taken insofar as it is white-coloured, is under this description not an animal.

But if it is considered in the first meaning [i.e. without consideration], then the white-coloured insofar as it is white-coloured can share other features. So it is not the case that animal is denied of it. Its condition doesn't require animal to be denied of it, or to be affirmed of it. So it is not the case that the white-coloured, insofar as it is white-coloured in this meaning, is not animal; rather it can be animal. Except that one says:

- (4) White-coloured is not, insofar as it is a thing which is white-coloured in this meaning, [not] an animal. (147.16)

where the expression insofar as it is white-coloured is transferred to the predicate. So it is clear that when we say:

- (5) A thing that is white-coloured is not an animal.

it is not true in this meaning, ...

It will give some relief and satisfaction to know that none of the premise-pairs that we study in the present enterprise involve any consideration of this, I mean of the subject and the predicate being 'insofar as' or 'not insofar as'. (Preliminary trans. Hodges)

Text H. Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt* v.1, 196.1–16 on indifference of essence.

It is possible to combine all this [in saying] that this universal is that whose very conception does not prevent its being predicated of many. ... the definition of “horseness” is not the definition of universality, nor is universality included in the definition of “horseness”; for, in itself, it is neither one nor many ... Rather, in terms of itself, it is only “horseness”. Rather, oneness is an attribute that conjoins with “horseness”, whereby “horseness” with this attribute becomes one. Similarly, in addition to this attribute, “horseness” has many other attributes that enter it. Thus, “horseness”—on the condition that, in its definition, it corresponds to many things—becomes general; and, because it is taken with properties and accidents to which one points, it is specific. “Horseness,” however, is in itself only “horseness”. (Trans. Marmura [4] p149.)

Text I. Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt* v.1, para 11, a pointer to logic.

If [after this] someone asks, saying, “Do you not answer, saying, ‘It is not such and such [a thing]; and its not being such and such [a thing] is other than its being humanity inasmuch as it is humanity?’” we say, “We do not answer by saying that inasmuch as it is humanity, it is not such [and such a thing], but we answer that it is not, inasmuch as it is humanity, such [and such a thing].” The difference between these two [statements] is known from logic. (Trans. Marmura [4] p. 151.)

References

- [1] Alain de Libera, *L’Art des Généralités*, Aubier, Paris 1999.
- [2] Ahmad Hasnawi, ‘Avicenna on the quantification of the predicate (with an appendix on [Ibn Zur^ca])’, in S. Rahman et al. (eds.), *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition*, Springer 2008, pp. 295–328.
- [3] Michael E. Marmura, *Probing in Islamic Philosophy*, Global Academic Publishing, Binghamton 2005.
- [4] Michael J. Marmura, *Avicenna: The Metaphysics of The Healing*, Brigham Young University Press, Provo Utah 2005.
- [5] Stephen Menn, ‘Avicenna’s metaphysics’, in Peter Adamson ed., *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013, pp. 143–169.

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