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AVICENNA AND THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF TALKING ABOUT GOD

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Abstract

The most important claim of the thesis of the divine simplicity is that the daily expressions of language, which are constructed in reference to the material and composite beings, are not deep enough in the meaning, to the degree that one may not directly use them when talking about God. This claim, which is about the meaning mode of references to God and the insufficiency of the form of reference, has brought about the problem of what sort of language must be used when talking about God. This study addresses the question of what kind and to what degree the resemblance of the caused beings to the final cause (God) – a resemblance that they possess in their natures – allows human beings to talk about the final cause. While the study presents an analysis of the views of Avicenna and Aquinas on talking about God, examining the differences and similarities between them, it will not give a detailed account of their dispute on the distinction between essence and existence in God.

Key Words: Aquinas, Avicenna / Ibn Sīnā, God, attribute, *dhāt*, essence, *tashkik* and analogia

The question of what kind of being God is comes before the issue of whether one can talk about Him. This is because the question of what kind of being God is a question which determines whether God, whose existence is claimed, exists or not. When someone, who states that *God exists* is asked “*what kind of essence does God have as an existent being?*,” the answer allows verifiability and falsifiability of

the propositions acquired about God. It indirectly determines whether someone can talk about God or not. Thus, in order to determine the truth and falsity of knowledge about something, it is primarily necessary that one knows what essence (*essentia/quiddita/dbāt*) that thing has, because what is not understood can neither be rejected, nor accepted. After the problem of what kind of existence God is settled, it is possible to discuss the issues such as, whether one can talk about Him or not, and the possibility of the talking, and which language/rhetoric should be used.

Another important factor that determines the talking about God is the understanding of ontology which is hold. While philosophers and theologians in the Middle Ages support constitutional ontology, modern philosophers and theologians accept constructional ontology. With regard to the question of how the divine simplicity must be understood, this difference fundamentally influenced the possibility of the talking about God. In particular, discussions on the reality and nature of the attributes, a topic which allows talking about God and defining His essence, and on what relationship between the attributes and the *dbāt* is established, determined the possibility of talking about God as well as His essence. That is to say, every defining name and attribute which is referred to God in order to define Him would cause complexity in God, even if it is in the mental level. In that case, the meaning of the concept which constitutes the definition would refer to a different part or element in God. This would lead to the opinion that God has some sort of complexity, in accordance with the ideas of the philosophers in the middle ages, who hold constitutional ontology. The basic claim of the idea of the simplicity is that any statement and concept cannot be not enough to define Him, due to His being perfection and uniqueness.

When we take Avicenna's works as a whole, we cannot claim that he addresses the issue of the possibility of talking about God and the nature of theological language as much detailed and systematical as Aquinas does. Avicenna claims that one cannot apply neither any definition (*ḥadd*) nor any description about the *dbāt* of God, thus, cannot talk about Him. He further states that one can only know that God exists, and can talk about, therefore, His existence.¹ The basic

¹ Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Alī Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-shifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt II* (eds. George C. Anawati, Ibrāhīm Madkūr, and Sa'īd Zāyid; Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1975), 8.5, 349.

reason for Avicenna to claim that God's *dhāt* is undefinable is that every concept that is used about His *dhāt* alludes to some determinations about God. With regard to these determinations, these concepts would also allude to some parts in His *dhāt*. In other words, every concept that is found in definitions about the *dhāt* of God would signify a different part that constitutes Him. Just like every word in any definition contributes to constitution of the general meaning ... However, since any partition is impossible for His simplicity, the usage of any concept that demonstrates the parts is impossible, too. Besides, every definition, to the degree that it limits the thing it defines, means commonality and difference (genus, *differentia*, etc.), the thing, which can be defined, would not be unique. This, in turn, contradicts the idea of simplicity and uniqueness of God, an idea that is the basic thesis of the divine simplicity.

Another reason for Avicenna to claim that it is not possible to directly talk about God because He is not describable is that the state in which the definition/the defined exists (*dhāt*) is mentally perceived and expressed. Thus, talking about God, in relation to the possibility of defining God, would necessitate the *dhāt* of God to be included in a certain category or categories, or classified with other beings due to similarities and differences. Due to all this concerns, Avicenna claims that one cannot directly talk about God, because of the idea that a definition of *Wājib al-wujūd* is not possible.²

According to the problem of the possibility of knowing the essence of God, both Avicenna and Aquinas attempt to explain God's essence/*dhāt*, as well as the possibility of knowing God, as they judge from the principle that the essence of being and its cause must

² Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-shifāʾ: al-Ilābiyyāt I* (eds. George C. Anawati, Ibrāhīm Madkūr, and Saʿīd Zāyid; Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿamma li-l-Kitāb, 1975), 5.7-9; 9.1, 373; 1.7, 45-46; id., *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.4-5; id., *Kitāb al-naġāt fī l-ḥikma al-mantiqiyya wa-l-ḥabīʿiyya wa-l-ilābiyya* (ed. Mājid Fakhri; Beirut: Dār al-ʿĀfāq al-Jadīda, 1985), 259-260; 266-271; id., *al-Risāla al-ʿarabiyya fī tawḥīdihī taʿālā wa-ṣifātihī*, in *Majmūʿ rasāʾil al-Sheikh al-Raʾīs* (Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1354 H.), 3-17; Ḥasan ʿĀṣī, *al-Taḥsīn al-Qurʾānī wa-l-luġba al-ṣūfiyya fī falsafat Ibn Sīnā* (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-Jāmiʿiyya, 1983), 106-107; Parviz Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā): A Critical Translation-Commentary and Analysis of Fundamental Arguments in Avicenna's Metaphysica in the Dānish Nāma-i ʿalāʾī (The Book of Scientific Knowledge)* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1973), 57-59.

be identical, or that essence must not be different from being. Avicenna explains the possibility of knowledge, basing himself on the idea that the created beings constitute God's *lāzims* because they emanated from God.³ Moreover, Aquinas tries to do that by basing himself on the First Cause giving causes to other created beings, and criticizes Avicenna's understanding of emanation.⁴ Avicenna states that *Wājib al-wujūd* has a *positive* and *negative* relation (*idāfa*) to the beings which emanated from Him. According to him, our mind achieves the possibility of talking about God leaning on this kind of relationship, which is different but connected with each other. Similar to the relationship between cause and effect, Avicenna bases this relationship, which has two different aspects as positive and negative, on the idea that created beings emanate from God, and that they are God's *lāzims*.⁵ Just as Avicenna does, Aquinas explains the possibility of knowing God because God is the first cause and the created beings are caused beings, basing himself on the idea that the effect has similarities with the cause, or that the agent leaves some personal marks on the affected. Aquinas sees as possible talking about God, considering the relationship between cause and effect. The relation of God to the created beings, in the words of Aquinas, is a relation that develops from something to another (*in transitu*), and this relation is not coming from causal similarity.⁶ The fact that God has an ultimate sim-

³ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.4, 343; 9.3, 396-397; id., *al-Isbārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt: Qism 3: al-Ilābiyyāt* (ed. Sulaymān Dunyā; Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960), 183-185; 218; 97; id., *al-Najāt*, 286.

⁴ Aquinas wrote his work *De Potentia* in order to criticize Avicennas' theory of emanation. In this work, Aquinas attempts to prove that God, the First Cause and First Being, created things out of non-existence in terms of His will. See Beatrice H. Zedler, "Saint Thomas and Avicenna in the 'De Potentia Dei,'" *Traditio* 6 (1948), 105-159.

⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt* (ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī; Qum: Maktabat al-Ilām al-Islāmī, n.d.), 103; id., *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 9.3, 396-397; 8.4, 343-344; 'Āṣī, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī*, 107.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia (DP)* in *Quaestiones Disputatae* (8th rev. edn., vol. II: ed. P. Bazzi et al.; Turin & Rome: Mariette, 1949), q. 7, a. 8, 5; id., *Divi Thomae Aquinatis Summa Theologica (ST)* (Rome: Ex Typographia Senatus, 1886), q. 12, a. 12, q. 13, a. 1; id., *Summa Contra Gentiles (SCG)*, (as the vols. XIII-XV of the series of "Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P.M. edita;" Rome: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918-1930), c. 9.

ple structure does not prevent Him from having a kind of relation to the beings which are caused by Him. Contrarily, the simple structure of God develops different relations to the caused beings, to the degree that God causes the created beings.⁷

Both philosophers accept that the source, which allows the possibility of talking about God, is the similarity, which the caused beings have about their cause. They also agree on the point that the relationship is not in God, and has an *asymmetric* character. The negative and positive names and qualities, which Avicenna defines as relation and the similarity, which Aquinas defines as relation are to be found out of the *dhāt* and essence of God (*secundum aliquid extra*), due to absolute simplicity. Otherwise any change that could occur because of the temporality of the relation would necessarily lead to a change in the essence/*dhāt* of God. Hence, the relation, which allows the talking, takes places in the created beings themselves, out of the *dhāt*.⁸ Accordingly, every cause or agent produces a result, which resembles it, or at least has some parts that resembles it. Similar to that, every cause gives to the thing it causes some personal characters.⁹ This situation can be called “the seal” of the First and Final Cause, or its self-reflection of His *mābiyya* and nature.¹⁰

Avicenna proves the relationship, which allows the talking about God, by stating that beings that hierarchically emanate from God have two different relations with God, as positive and negative relations. According to him, the two relations are effects of the actions that belong to God’s *dhāt*. Since every effect has a partial similarity to its cause, it is possible to talk about God, i.e., the First Cause, judging from the created beings. The most important similarity between the first being and the created beings is the *wujūd* that they both have:

Now we say, “even if existence is not a genus as you know, and not equally predicated of what is under, it is a common meaning in terms of priority (*taqaddum*) and posteriority (*ta’akhhur*). *Wujūd* belongs to the *mābiyya*, which consists of substance, and then, to the thing follows (*a’rād*). Since *wujūd* is a single meaning as we have said, it clings to the accidents (*a’rād*), which is special to it, as we have stat-

⁷ Aquinas, *DP*, q. 7, a. 8.

⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.4, 344; Aquinas, *DP*, q. 7, a. 8.

⁹ Ḥāṣī, *al-Taḥsīn al-Qur’ānī*, 107; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 9.3, 396-397.

¹⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.4, 343-344.

ed before.¹¹

Similarly, Aquinas says:

All created beings have a shared effect, which is *esse* (existence)... Thus, there must be a high cause that enables every cause to produce the same effect, i.e., *esse*. This cause is God. The effect, which is in accordance with the nature of the cause, comes from the cause. Hence, *esse* ought to be the substance, or nature of God.¹²

As is understood from the passages, both philosophers seek to explain the nature of knowledge and God's being the first cause in the same way. Apart from God's being causeless, they try to explain God's directly being the first cause, stating that every cause gives something from its nature in a way, which accords to its nature. Moreover, they lead the way to the possibility of knowing and talking about the cause through the results, by stating that, in the produced results, all the causes bring about effects that are similar to them. Regarding the fact that the common thing between the two kinds of existence is *wujūd* or *esse*, the knowledge that we have as certain about Him is His existence. This is because the divine *mābiyya*/nature creates a common effect between actions and the results of action, and this effect is *wujūd/esse*. The *wujūd/esse*, which God and the created beings share, allows the language, which is formed judging from the created beings to be used for God as well.

Consequently, both philosophers base the possibility of talking about God on the relationship between God and the caused beings. They also follow similar way in the issue of the quality of the talking. They agree on that the concepts in the daily language, which are constituted from the caused beings and have limited meanings, may not be used as they are for God, who is the Perfect and the Simple. They also agree on that these concepts may not be used in a way that has completely different mode of meaning. Concepts that are constituted in reference to the concrete, material, and composite beings in daily language are so limited that they may not define and talk about the structure of the divine *dbāt*. However, the common meanings of the qualities and names, which are based on the similarity and relation

¹¹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, I.5, 34-35; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, 66, 39.

¹² Aquinas, *DP*, q. 7, a. 2 resp., a. 5 resp.

between two beings, cannot be eliminated. Thus, as a first step to solve this problem, Avicenna and Aquinas clarify the quality of the relationship between the beings that surround our mind, and us and the divine being, which is simple and perfect. As I have stated above, Avicenna allows the possibility of talking about God by stating that God has a relation to the created beings, a relation that both has negative and positive aspects. Meanwhile, Aquinas allows the possibility of the language, leaning on the similarity, which occurs as a result of God's being final and first cause of the caused beings.

According to Avicenna, when talking about God it is possible that some names and attributes belong only to God, while others belong only to the created beings. He states that some names and attributes that are attributable to both beings cannot be related to both God and the created beings in the same mode of meaning. Due to this basic difference, the fundamental issue, which the philosopher takes into consideration about the names and attributes which are attributable both to God and other beings, is God's perfection and the finitude of the created beings.¹³ Avicenna states that the names and attributes, which are acquired from the created beings in daily language, cannot be predicated to the *dhāt* of the created. He further points to some issue, which must be taken into consideration in, the *idāfa* of these names and attributes. The first is the consciousness about the structural difference between two beings. The second is that the mode of meaning for the names and attributes, which are to be attributed with regard to this structural difference, have to be changed due to the being which the attribution takes place.

Aquinas addresses the issue of what kind of language should be used when talking about God, under the title *De Divinis Nominibus (On Divine Names)*.¹⁴ Similar to the issues Avicenna talks about on the attribution of the names and the attributes, Aquinas concentrates on *ratio nominis* (the meaning of the name, the mode of the meaning). However, different from Avicenna in the issue of the essence and the quality of the attributes of God, he makes the distinction *res significata* (that which something is attributed) ve *modus significandi* (the mode of attribution), starting directly from the form of the

¹³ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, 5; id., *al-Ilāhiyyāt II*, 8.5, 354; 8.6, 355; 8.7, 367-368.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio* (ed. Ceslari Pera; Turin & Rome: Marietti, 1950), q. 7, a. 5.

attribution, its meaning, and the entity to which the attribute is related. In other words, he differentiates between meaning and reference.¹⁵ The first of these is meaning (*modus significandi*), whereas the second is predication (*res significata*).¹⁶ By doing this, Aquinas differentiates between the etymological meaning of a name or a quality, and the mode of meaning which it acquires in relation to the being it references.¹⁷ Aquinas' purpose for is that qualities, which look similar to each other, gain different meanings according to the being they are attributed. If the meaning of the attribute of God and its mode of meaning are quite similar to the meaning of the qualities, which the created beings have, these cannot be attributed to God. This is because the source of the mode of meaning for these attributed qualities are the created beings, thus, they might mean deficiency and finitude. According to the thing which the attributed names signify (*res significata*), these names are/must be attributed to God, rather than to the created beings. The perfection, which the names signify, develops from God through the created beings. However, since we know first the created beings in terms of the styles of the attribution, Aquinas states, we first attribute names to the created beings. He stresses that names are the modes of attribution (*modus significandi*), which are the sources for the created beings.¹⁸

Another reason for Aquinas to make a distinction between the meaning of the attributes and the thing to which something is attributed is to distinguish between the mode of meaning which concepts have and the form of attribution which concepts possess because of the created beings. In other words, God who has the most perfect mode of meaning with regard to names and attributes, is to distinguish between the conceptual meaning of the names and the attributes, constituted because of the created beings, and the mode of attribution which is formed with regard to the perception of the names and the attributes of the created beings in our minds. According to Aquinas, qualities, which are attributed to God, truly allude to the perfect divine substance. However, he concludes that they fail

¹⁵ Aquinas, *DP*, q. 7, a. 2, ad. 7; id., *ST*, q.13 a.3, 5; In addition, see Rahim Acar, *Creation: A Comparative Study between Avicenna's and Aquinas' Positions* (PhD dissertation; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2002), 65 et seq.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, ad. 3; id., *SCG*, c. 33.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 8.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 6; id., *SCG*, c. 30; id., *DP*, q. 7, a. 2, ad. 7; q. 7, a. 4, ad. 1.

when defining the perfection the divine substance has. Thus Aquinas accepts that positive qualities can be attributed to God, and that they might be regarded as true attributes because they refer to the divine substance. However even if these attributions may be regarded as correct in terms of *res significata*, they fall short of defining the divine substance, because they are formed judging from the created beings in terms of *modus significandi*.¹⁹ As a main reason for that, Aquinas points to the fact that the created beings possess names and attributes in limited and deficient way. He also mentions the weakness of our mind in perceiving them and of our language in conceptualizing them.²⁰

A name can have different modes of meaning with regard to the thing it refers. For instance, the name “stone” means a solid matter when referring a physical object and soundness in psychological meaning. While the psychological meanings can be used in reference to God, the soundness in physical meaning cannot be used for God. As in the example of stone, a name has different modes of meaning. While the limited and deficient meanings can be used for the created beings, they cannot be used for God.²¹ In this case, while we use the concepts, which we have in the context of the daily language in reference to God, we cannot directly attribute the limited meaning of the concepts to God, in order to prevent anthropomorphism. Therefore, the names and attributes, which are formed with regard to the created beings, cannot be used directly for God, preserving the literal meaning. The thing to do in this case is to negate the deficient and limited meanings of the names, which are determined with regard to the qualities of the created beings, and to use them to refer to God by making them perfect.²²

Avicenna does not address the issue with systematical details like Aquinas, such as *res significata* and *modus significandi*. However, judging from what he says in the issue of how names and attributes,

¹⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 3; Gregory Rocca, “The Distinction between Res Significata and Modus Significandi in Aquinas’s Theological Epistemology,” *The Thomist* 55 (1991), 178.

²⁰ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 1-3.

²¹ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 3, ad. 3; q. 13, a. 2, ad. 2; q. 13, a. 8, ad. 2.

²² Aquinas, *SCG*, c. 14; Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York, NY: Random House, 1956), 104.

we can say both philosophers have similar concerns, pointing to the same problems. These problems are that the names and attributes are predicated in which meanings, in terms of their etymological meanings, their daily meanings, their modes of meaning when referring, and finally the beings that they refer to. This is because predication necessitates knowing the thing over which it is predicated. God who has transcendent and perfect nature is known indirectly based on the created beings. Thus, the knowledge about God is limited and deficient. Due to the fact that His essence/*dhāt* is known as much as understood, based on the created beings, things are predicated for Him to the degree that the knowledge is achieved. This means that names and attributes, which don't have the mode of meaning, which perfectly signifies His essence/*dhāt*, cannot be attributed to Him.²³ Giving the examples of *persona* (identity, individual) and *perfectus* (that which occurs, that with which comes to existence), Aquinas states that names and attributes can be attributed to God, considering the meanings of the attributed predicates, i.e., the etymological, real meanings and those meanings in the time of attribution.²⁴ Thus, when predicating the names and qualities in the daily language, which are formed according to the created beings, one must take into consideration the formal meaning of the predicated names and qualities, the

²³ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, 265; id., *al-Ilāhiyyāt II*, 8.7, 368; 8.7, 367-368; Majid Fakhry, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (2nd edn., London: Longman & New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983), 154; Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis (Sententiae I)* (vol. I: ed. R. P. McDonnet; Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929), I, d. 22, q. 1.

²⁴ Aquinas gives two more different examples except the example of stone. The first is "*persona* (person, personality)" which he uses when addressing the nature of trinity and the issue how the trinity is named. He says that personality is attributed to the elements of trinity, judging from the substance they share among them. Since it means etymologically the substance as a whole, it can be predicated of God. However, Aquinas warns that personality cannot be attributed to God while it has the same meaning as in the created beings. See Aquinas, *Sententiae I*, d. 23, q. 1; The second example is the quality of *perfectus* (perfection) which we frequently use for God. In Latin, the quality of *perfectus* consists of the words *per* (through, every, etc.) and *fectus* (that which happens). Completely considering the etymological meaning, we can call the created beings *perfectus*, i.e., *that which happens, through which happens*. However, the etymological meaning of *perfectus* as it is cannot be attributed to God. If another meanings of *perfectus* such as "what exists with itself," "actual," which are not etymological, is considered, they can be predicated of God. See Aquinas, *SCG*, c. 28.

mode of meaning in the time of attribution and the structure of the attributed being.²⁵ The most important thing to do in this case is to make names and qualities go through some process in order to make their meaning suitable for attributing to God.

Avicenna bases himself on the impossibility of perceiving the *dhāt* of *Wājib al-wujūd* per se. He states that the attributes are nothing but partial and deficient definitions about His existence, rather than explaining what He is. In other words, the attributes are the conceptualized forms of our attempt to define God considering the actions of God, a transcendent and perfect being which is far from the perception of our mind. For example, the attribute of power, which is attributed to His *dhāt* because of the created beings, does not give direct information about the power of His *dhāt*. Rather, it points to God's being the final and first cause of the created beings, or the source of existence for them. The attribute of power also informs us about God's absolute power and that He is able to create and do everything. Thus, this attribute gives us indirect information about God's actions, which are echoes of His power and the effects of these actions, namely, the creation and the source of the created beings.²⁶

Both Avicenna and Aquinas state that the attribution of the names and qualities, which are formed about the first cause considering the qualities of the caused beings, allows the idea that the created beings and the creator share same qualities. They state that this idea does not necessarily mean that the names and attributes, which are attributed to both beings, have the same meanings and the same predications.²⁷ Like in the example of stone, it has different meanings according to the different contexts.²⁸ The form of meaning and predication meant for names or attributes when talking about the qualities of the created beings is different from the form of meaning intended for the names and attributes when talking about God. One of the reasons for this

²⁵ Aquinas, *Sententiae I*, d. 2, q. 1.

²⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.4, 368.

²⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.4, 344; id., *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, IV.I, 16; id., *al-Risāla al-ʿarshiyya*, 5; id., *al-Najāt*, 264, 280, 287.

²⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 5; id., *DP*, q. 7, a. 7; id., *Compendium Theologiae ad fratrem Reginaldum socium suum carissimum*, in *Opuscula theologica, vol. I: De re dogmatica et morali (CT I)* (ed. Raimundo A. Verardo; Turin & Rome: Marietti, 1954), c. 25-27.

difference is that God has these names and qualities in an absolute and perfect way, while the created beings have them in a deficient and limited way.²⁹

Avicenna's and Aquinas' claim that God cannot be perceived directly, that names and attributes, which are formed according to the created beings, can be predicated of God after some stages (*analogia/tashkik*, *ratio/salb*, *eminentia/kamāl*) cause some problems. For instance, whether this kind of relationship can be settled between two different beings whose modes of existence are completely different ... One may not claim that there is similarity all the time, judging from the relationship between the cause and the caused. Moreover, while Avicenna and Aquinas claim that God is a transcendent being, thus our minds cannot understand His essence, they also claim that the qualities of the finite and composite beings can be attributed to God after going through certain stages. How the names and qualities, which are formed according to the created beings, are predicated of a being that is impossible to be known in certain and thorough way, given that the only knowledge about Him is the knowledge of its existence. Is the formation of the knowledge acquired according to the relationship between the cause and the caused in a process of different stages enough for knowing or conceptualizing the names and attributes He has? How is it known that the acquired names and attributes correspond to the being of which perfect and sufficient knowledge is not available, and that they refer to his *dhāt* in correct way?

Both philosophers think these questions can be answered by considering the relationship between the cause and the caused. As we have stated above, the reason the philosophers allow this kind of knowing considering the relationship between the cause and the caused is that the caused, if slightly, has some similarities to the cause. Qualities that are drawn from the composite beings do not define Him perfectly. However, as they claim, the names and attributes can be attributed to Him after going through certain stages. They think that we can only understand and express the simple existence of God through the names and attributes, because our mind is inclined to understand composite and temporary things. As an exam-

²⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 2-5; id., *DP*, q. 7, a. 5, resp.; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.4, 368; id., *al-Ishārāt*, 118-124.

ple, the eternal generation is to be understood and expressed by temporal things.³⁰

Although the method they offer is partially different, both philosophers hold that the relation of the names and attributes predicated of the created beings to the thing they are predicated of is different from the relation of the names and attributes of God to God Himself. This difference is as follows: The names and qualities of the created beings are not the same as their essences. However, God's names and attributes are the same as His *mābiyya/dbāt*. Thus, although God's perfection is necessarily essential, the deficient and limited qualities of the created beings are in an accidental relation to their essences. In other words, the existence of the created beings is different from the names and qualities and in a caused relation to them. This also means that the qualities which the created beings have a causal relation to the essence/*dbāt* of God. Hence, Avicenna and Aquinas state that the qualities of the created beings are possible to be metaphorically, not literally, attributed to God. Besides, the fact that God is the source of the existence and qualities in the created beings and the cause of the relationship allows the attribution of the names and qualities to God, after certain stages.³¹ They say that to claim the attributes being univocally identical cause the transcendence of God to lose its meaning. Moreover, to claim the attributes being equivocally identical cause the knowability of the necessary being to be impossible. In order to analyze the essences of the attributes and the relations between them on the one hand, and to prevent the impossibility of the knowledge of God on the other, they offer *tashkīk* and the usage of the *analogical* language.³²

1. *Tashkīk* and Analogia as a Way of Talking about God

In several places of his works, Avicenna uses the term *bi l-tashkīk* when addressing the *nature* of the attributes, their relations to God and between them. We can translate the term *tashkīk* as ambiguous, and as *analogy* as well.³³ Especially in terms of the relation of the

³⁰ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 1; Ḥāṣī, *al-Taḥsīn al-Qurʿānī*, 107; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Risāla al-ʿarsbiyya*, 13; id., *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.7, 368.

³¹ Aquinas, *ST*, q.13, 3 c.

³² Ḥāṣī, *al-Taḥsīn al-Qurʿānī*, 117-110; Aquinas, *CTI*, c. 27.

³³ In the context of the type of attribution for God's attributes and in relation to the distinction between *equivocal* which has completely different meanings and

attributes to the *dhāt*, the possibility of talking about God, it is proper for us to use the word *analogy*.³⁴ The philosopher does not use the word *analogy* in his works. However, he compares the things to each other using the *taqaddum* and the *ta'akbbur* contexts, in terms of the rank, nature (*mābiyya*), nobility (*kamāl*), with reference to the meaning and function of the proportion and syllogism which correspond to the word "analogy."³⁵

We can find the *tashkīk*, which was used in Avicenna in terms of *taqaddum* and *ta'akbbur*, first in Aristotle,³⁶ afterwards in al-Fārābī.³⁷ The philosopher uses the term *tashkīk* in order to differentiate between the names and attributes the *Wājib al-wujūd* has and those of the created beings. He also uses it to express the idea that God possesses the attributes referred to him in a more perfect and infinite form than the created beings.³⁸ The attribution of the qualities

univocal which only has a single meaning, Aristotle talks about a third concept, which is *ambibolus*. By this concept, he means that a quality is neither equivocally nor univocally attributed, according to the thing it is attributed. He further means by it that it is attributed in similar meaning, although there is a basic difference according to the thing it is attributed. Wolfson claims that the term *ambibolus*, which was used by Aristotle, was later used by Muslim philosophers who followed the teaching of Aristotle including Avicenna, by means of translations. He claims that Avicenna refers to *ambibolus* by *mushakkak*. First, the concept was used by al-Fārābī, Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Rushd. Later, it is translated to Latin as *ambiguus* and from Hebrew (in the 15th century) as *analogicus* (analogy). For more information see Harry A. Wolfson, "The Amphibolous Terms in Aristotle, Arabic Philosophy and Maimonides," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion* (eds. Isadora Twersky and George H. Williams; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), I, 455-477. Also see Acar, *Creation*, 45-49.

³⁴ Ḥāṣhī, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī*, 117-120.

³⁵ Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, 39-40; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, 4.1, 163-169; Acar, *Creation*, 46-47.

³⁶ Aristotle, *De Anima* (translated into English by J. A. Smith), in Richard McKeon (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York, NY: Random House, 1941), 402b; id., *Metaphysics* (translated into English by Richard Hope; Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), 2, 1003a.

³⁷ Wolfson, "The Amphibolous Terms ...," 456-459. For more information on the source of *tashkīk*, its historical development and its usage in the works of al-Fārābī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, and Maimonides see *ibid.*, 455-477.

³⁸ Wolfson, "Avicenna, Algazali and Averroes on Divine Attributes," in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, I, 153-154.

such as existence, oneness, substance, and cause to God and to the created beings according to the method of *bi l-tashkīk*, not in the same mode of meaning is of this kind.³⁹ Thus, by using the term *bi l-tashkīk* when talking about God, Avicenna means “having the attributed qualities,” *before-ness* (*taqaddum*), *after-ness* (*taʾakbbur*), or *perfect* (*kamāl*), or “having in the secondary level.”⁴⁰

As for Aquinas, he most frequently uses the expression *analogy* (*analogicus-analogiae*), as he elaborates on the relation of the attributes to the divine essence and the relation of God to the created beings. He is aware of Aristotle’s *ambiguous*, and the Latin translations of *tashkīk* and *mushakkak*, i.e., *ambiguus*, *analogia*, etc. He uses the concept *analogia* to render what Aristotle and Avicenna mean by those words. In addition to Avicenna’s *tashkīk* as *taqaddum* and *taʾakbbur*, Aquinas uses the concept of analogy, having in mind wider meanings such as similarity (*similitudo*), imitation (*imitatio*), assimilation (*assimilitatio*), and exemplification (*exemplar*).⁴¹ Although he uses different words to express what he means by analogy, he defines analogy as a proportion based on the particular similarity which allows talking about God, as Aristotle and Avicenna does. In doing that, he states that analogy implies neither that the attributes of God are completely different from God (*aequivocus*) nor that they are identical to Him (*univocus*).

In terms of the issue of analogy, we can see the discussions in early philosophers such as Aristotle, as to whether the same thing is meant when the concepts are used for two different beings, or what is meant when the same concept is used for two different concepts. For example, Aristotle points to the relationship between meaning and reference, distinguishing between “intensional” and “extensional.”⁴² In the context of the distinction between intensional and exten-

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 155-156; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, 4.1, 163-167.

⁴⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, 4.1, 163-164; Acar, *Creation*, 45.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Veritate (DV)* in *Quaestiones Disputatae* (8th rev. edn., vol. I: ed. Raymundi Spiazzi; Turin & Rome: Mariette, 1949), q. 9, a. 10; id., *SCG*, c. 15, 23; id., *ST*, q. 13, a. 9; q. 35, a. 1; q. 17; id., *Sententiae I*, q. 4, a. 11; For further information see Wolfson, “The Amphibolous Terms ...,” 476-477.

⁴² Aristotle, *Categoriae* (= *Categories*) (translated into English by E. M. Edghill), in Richard McKeon (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ch. 1, 1a, 1-12; Acar, *Creation*, 48-49.

sional, the same concept can be used for two different beings in genus. Sometimes a concept can also be used for different beings in species, while they are the same in genus. This shows us that analogy and the language that is formed according the deficient and limited created beings can be used to describe the transcendent and perfect being. For instance, when we say “Aḥmad is alive” and “plant is alive” in the context of analogy, even if Aḥmad and plant are different species, the life, which we attribute to them, is the same. Despite this similarity, we know that the life we attribute to the two things is not totally the same. We are aware of what we mean by the life in two attributions, too. Moreover, different from *tabṣkīk’s taqaddum* and *ta’akbbur*, analogy’s aspects regarding proportion and syllogism are more dominant.

Aquinas’ concept of analogy gains importance to define the transcendent and metaphysical beings of the daily language. Analogy becomes the most important method, which acquires the positive knowledge about God. Analogy shows that the names and attributes that are attributed to the divine *dhāt* when the philosophers and theologians talk about God cannot be attributed to God in a way that they are attributed to the created beings. It also allows them to be away from the sophism and exaggeration while talking about God.⁴³ Aquinas generally uses the expression analogy to explain that a name has different relations to different things at the same time. He also uses this concept to express the similar aspects of the same name in different things. In particular, he uses this term to explain that *Necesse Esse* and the attributes predicated of the created beings are in different form and mode of meaning.⁴⁴ To put it differently, he wants to show that God and the created beings have different relations to the same name.

Giving the example of *esse* as Avicenna’s example of *wujūd*, Aquinas states that the created beings possess the *esse* in the second level, when compared to God.⁴⁵ Avicenna and Aquinas agree on that

⁴³ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 106.

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *De Principiis Naturae* (introduction and critical text by John J. Pauson; Fribourg: Société Philosophique & Leuven: E. Nauwelaerts, 1950), c. 3, a. 1; *ST*, q. 3, a. 5; Acar, *Creation*, 63-64.

⁴⁵ Both philosophers support the similar view, i.e., *taqaddum-ta’akbbur*, when discussing whether *wujūd* and *esse* are common qualities among the created beings, the issue of the reality of the qualities and their relation to *dhāt*. Ibn Sīnā, *al-*

the most important factor to allow *tashkik* and analogy between God and the created beings is the partial similarity because of the relationship between the cause and the caused.⁴⁶ The names and attributes attributed to God and the created beings are in different modes of meaning and expressed by different concepts. However, they refer to the same thing. *Tashkik* stresses *taqaddum* and *ta'akbbur*, while analogy stresses proportion. However, the shared point between them is that God is perfect and that the created beings are limited and finite. This is because God must be attributable of the perfect forms of all the names and attributes because of His perfect structure. Since the created beings are partial and finite in structure, the qualities that are attributed to them must be deficient and limited. Analogy, which is based on the relationship between cause and effect, entails a type of relationship which is based on limited, metaphorical, and deficient.⁴⁷ This basic difference allows the *taqaddum* and the *ta'akbbur* of the *tashkik* and the proportion of analogy. If God and the created beings had not had different forms of perfection, there would have not been any shared point between them. Therefore, one would not have referred to the *dhāt* of God in the contexts of proportion, *taqaddum*, and *ta'akbbur*.⁴⁸

Furthermore, we can clarify the difference between Avicenna's *tashkik* and Aquinas' analogy, comparing them in context of God's oneness and the perfection of His being. In terms of *tashkik*, Avicenna compares the *waḥdāniyya* or being *aḥad* of *Wājib al-wujūd* to the oneness of the created beings. The attribute *wāḥid* is attributed to God as a necessity of His perfection. By doing that, not only His oneness in quantitative sense, but in qualitative sense is meant. Avicenna attributes *waḥdāniyya* to God in order to make Him free in logical sense from the parts by which definition might cause to His *dhāt*, in metaphysical sense from the composition of accident and substance,

Ilābiyyāt I, I.5, 34-35; 4.1, 163-167; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, 66; 39; Aquinas, *DP*, q. 7, a. 2, ad. 9; q. 7, a. 4; id., *SCG*, c. 22, 30; id., *Le "De ente et Essentia" de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (ed. Marie-Dominique Roland-Gosselin; Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1948), c. 1, 5; *ST*, q. 13, a. 6.

⁴⁶ 'Āṣī, *al-Taḥsīn al-Qur'ānī*, 107; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, 287; id., *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.5, 354; id., *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, 4.1, 163-164; id., *al-Risāla al-'arsbiyya*, 13; Aquinas, *ST*, q. 12, a. 12, I; q. 13, a. 5 resp.; id., *SCG*, c. 29; id., *DP*, q. 7, a. 5; id., *CTI*, c. 27.

⁴⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, 4.1, 163-164; Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 5 resp.; id., *CTI*, c. 27.

⁴⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, 265; Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 4; id., *SCG*, c. 31.

in ontological sense from part that would form Him. When *wahdāniyya* is predicated of the created beings, the purpose is rather a quantitative oneness. Besides, it is not a logical or metaphysical oneness, and means a secondary level (*ta'akbkbur*) existence as compared to God.⁴⁹ Contrary to *Wājib al-wujūd*, the structure of the created beings is a composite form such as *šūra-bayūlā, bi l-quwwa-bi l-fi'l*, substance-accident.⁵⁰ However, *Wājib al-wujūd* is absolute *aḥad* and one, because He is simple and *bi l-fi'l* existent. It cannot be said that He is a composite being neither in mind, nor in definition and reality.⁵¹ The usage of the expression *aḥad* for the created beings is no more than its analogical usage.⁵² Thus, by *tasbkik*, Avicenna points to the fact that oneness is more perfect in God than the created beings, and that it is found in the created beings in the second level. However, Aquinas bases the oneness of God on the proofs for His being absolute, simple, and actual. He, then, concludes that the oneness (*unum, unitate*), which is attributed to the created beings, is entirely analogical.⁵³ In this conclusion, one must take into consideration the meaning of the predicated name and quality at the moment of the predication of any name and quality, that of which something is predicated, and the mode of predication.

Avicenna addresses the difference between *bi l-fi'l* existence of God and the existence of the created beings in the context of before-ness and after-ness (*taqaddum* and *ta'akbkbur*). He states that the created beings have existence in different types according to their closeness to the Simple and One, in the context the theory of emanation. However, God who is the first being, is the source of existence for everything that exists. Thus, all the possible beings owe their existences to Him. This means that God has existence before the creat-

⁴⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt II*, 8.4, 343-345; 9.1, 373; id., *al-Najāt*, 263-368; id., *al-Ta'liqāt*, 183-185; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, 38-39.

⁵⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt II*, 9.4, 402; 8.6, 355-356; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, 54-55, 45; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Isbārāt*, 54, 45-46; id., *al-Najāt*, 264, 229; id., *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād* (ed. 'Abd Allāh Nūrānī, Tehran: Mu'assasa-i Muṭāla'āt-i Islāmī, 1363 HS.), 10-11; 'Āṣī, *al-Taḥsīn al-Qur'ānī*, 107.

⁵¹ 'Āṣī, *ibid.*, 109; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt I*, 1.5, 34-35; 4.1, 163-167; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, 66; 39; Wolfson, "Avicenna, Algazali and Averroes on Divine Attributes," 143.

⁵² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt I*, 4.1, 164-167.

⁵³ Aquinas, *DP*, q. 7, a. 3; id., *ST*, q. 3, 5c; id., *SCG*, c. 25.

ed beings and in a more perfect way, and that the created beings have existence in the second level. God who is the final cause is the cause of the existence of the caused being, when is considered in the context of the relationship between the cause and the caused. The cause has more perfect existence than the caused beings, since it precedes them in every aspect. Thus, when existence is attributed to the created beings and God, it is done so according to *taqaddum* and *ta'akbbur*.⁵⁴

Aquinas criticizes the difference of the possession of existence between God and the created beings in the context of Avicenna's theory of emanation. He reaches the conclusion that the necessary being is perfect and actual as much as absolute, judging from the absoluteness and perfection of the existence of God and the limitedness and causedness of the existence of the created beings. The caused beings receive existence afterwards, because the sources of the existence of the possible beings are the First Cause and the First Being. Due to this difference, the created beings have the attributed existence in the second level and the deficient form, compared to God.⁵⁵ Concerning the issue whether the existence in the context of *tashkik* and analogy can be both attributable to God and the created beings, both philosophers conclude that existence is attributable neither in completely different meanings nor in completely same meanings, on the contrary, it is attributable according to *tashkik* and analogy.⁵⁶

According to Aquinas, the thing that allows the relationship between two different beings and thus analogy is the similarity between cause and effect:

Proportion (*proportio*) is nothing other than the mutual relation of two things associated by something in respect to which they either agree or differ ... In one way, things may be associated as belonging to the same genus of quantity or quality, as is the relation of one surface to another or of one number to another ... In another way beings are said to be related when they are associated in a certain order; and in this way there is proportion between matter and form, between the maker and the thing made ... Thus there is a proportion between God

⁵⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, 4.1, 164-167; id., *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.6, 355-356; 9.3, 396-397.

⁵⁵ Aquinas, *DP*, q. 7, a. 1 resp.; q. 7, a. 1.

⁵⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.5, 350; 8.6, 356; Aquinas, *ST*, q. 3, a. 4 resp.; q. 4, a. 2 resp.; id., *CTI*, c. 11; id., *Sententiae I*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 2; id., *DP*, q. 7, a. 7.

and the created beings, such as the proportion between cause and effect and knower and knowable.⁵⁷

After stating the similarity, which allows analogy, Aquinas states that analogy is either in the form of proportion between things or proportion between many and one:

Names are analogically predicated in two ways: either according as many things are proportionate to one, or according as one thing is proportionate to another ... Now this mode of community of idea is a mean between pure equivocation (pure aequivoce) and simple univocation (simple univoce). For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same, yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals. But a term which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing. Thus "healthy" applied to urine signifies the sign of animal health, and applied to medicine signifies the cause of the same health.⁵⁸

The first type of analogy, which Aquinas talks about, is *proportio*, while the second is *proportionalitatis*. In *proportio*, a name is predicated of several objects in the same meaning. In other words, the attribution of one name or quality to many things and a name or attribute mean many relations. The predicated name or quality are used to state that the things among which an analogy is settled share the same quality, such as the shared existence between substance and accidents.⁵⁹ The name that is attributed to state this association is used in different meanings according to the relationship between the things, proportion, and the thing it refers. For instance, the concept *healthy* means the protector of health when applied to food, the provider of health when applied to medicine, the sign for health when applied to urine. Thus, every use of the concept of health refers to the same health, which is found in animals, signed by urine, provided by

⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Expositio super Librum Boethii de Trinitate* (ed. Bruno Decker; Leiden: Brill, 1955), q. 11, a. 2.

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 5 resp.; id., *CTI*, c. 27.

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *DV*, q. 2, a. 11 resp.; id., *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* (translated into English by John P. Rowan; Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1961), IV. L.1:C 536-37; In another work, Aquinas states that a thing can be predicated in three different ways. See id., *De Principiis Naturae*, 3, 1.

medicine and included by food.⁶⁰ Everything that is attributable of the name health is in a direct relation to *healthy*, and it has also the shared qualities that can be stated by the same quality. Although the quality of everyone is stated by the same concept, we cannot say that it directly means the same thing. The concept *health* points to different meanings in every unit. For instance, the quality, which is found in animals, signed by urine, provided by medicine and included by food, points to different aspects of the attributed thing.

The second type analogy, *proportionalitatis* is the indication of the relationship between two things. In other words, it is the exposure of the existent similarity by explaining the relation of the quality of a thing and the quality of another thing to their objects. In this kind of relationship, both beings are neither directly compared, nor is analogy set between them. On the contrary, the existent similarity is exposed considering the relation of two beings to the qualities they have. Let us take the example of the similarity between numbers six and four. Six is two times three, just as four is two times two. Thus the aspect of agreement between six and four is that they are two times of other numbers.⁶¹

In this kind of analogy, the validity of the proportion is related to the nature of the similarity between two things. For instance, the quality of *good* is both found in God and in the created beings and this situation allows analogy. However, we cannot say that it is a similarity which provides a full and correct information. The relation of good to God and the created beings is different in essence and, it is partial and deficient similarity, too. While God's relation to good or existence is necessary and essential, the created beings' relation to good and existence is possible as much as it is accidental. Therefore, Aquinas states that there is a similarity in terms of the relation of the qualities and existence of two things to the qualities. But he reminds us that this similarity can be totally metaphorical.⁶²

According to Aquinas, the proportion analogy cannot be applied when God and the created beings are considered. This is because, even if there is similarity between the qualities God has and the quali-

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, L.1:C 536-37; id., *ST*, q. 13, a. 5 resp.

⁶¹ Aquinas, *DV*, q. 2, a. 11 resp.

⁶² *Ibid.*

ties the created beings have, this similarity is deficient and partial. Proportion analogy is possible, if is used in a particular quality, name, or concept as a same meaning. However, when the basic differences between God and the created beings are considered, the usage of this kind of analogy is not correct. In this issue, Aquinas holds that the usage of *proportionalitatis* is more correct.⁶³

Aquinas points out that the best way to talk about God is the usage of the analogical language. When we consider his works as a whole, we see that he does not refer to a particular analogy. Rather he mentions different kinds of analogy under several titles of his works, according to the contexts of the topics he deals with. This analogy is sometimes based on similarity, and sometimes on proportion. Accordingly, Aquinas states that *analogy is proportion*,⁶⁴ or *analogy is proportion in reference to one*.⁶⁵ With the word *similitudo* (similarity) which is used to describe the similarity and relationship between God and the created beings, contrary to the cause-effect relationship, Aquinas means the created beings' imperfect description of the unique essence of God, such as the partial similarity of the picture or photograph to human.⁶⁶ In addition to the expression similarity, he also uses the expression representation (*repraesentatio*), judging from the relationship and the partial similarity between the cause and the caused. He thinks that the created beings possess in their essences the similarity, which represents God inasmuch as it allows analogy, if deficient and limited. Like in the examples of the representation of smoke for fire, or the statue of Mercury for Mercury in formal similarity, it can be said that the created beings represent the perfection of God, even if in deficient and limited form.⁶⁷ Aquinas' purpose for the expression *similitudo* (similarity) is the resemblance of the created beings to God, not vice versa. To put it more plainly, the similarity between two kinds of beings is asymmetrical, not symmetrical.⁶⁸ We can find the idea that similarity is one-sided, not two-sided, in Avicenna before Aquinas. When Avicenna addresses the source and

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 5.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *CTI*, c. 27.

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *DV*, q. 9, a. 10; id., *SCG*, c. 15; id., *ST*, q. 13, a. 9.

⁶⁷ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 2, 4, 5; id., *DV*, q. 9, 26; id., *SCG*, c. 17, 26, 54, 64.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, *DP*, q. 14, 23, 24; id., *SCG*, c. 15; id., *ST*, q. 13, a. 9; id., *DV*, q. 9, 22.

structure of the similarity (*idāfa*) between God and the created beings, he states that the similarity is one-sided and only found in the created beings, thus, his *dbāt* must be freed from similarity.⁶⁹

Aquinas uses *imitatio* (imitation) to state that the existent similarity is not in fact a direct similarity, on the contrary, it is a limited and deficient kind of similarity. His purpose for using imitation, is to eliminate misunderstandings about “image” which he uses to clarify his intention for the similarity. Aquinas uses image as a kind of similarity. He states that the created beings are God’s imitations, or His images.⁷⁰ Aquinas uses such expressions as imitation, image, representation etc., to define the one-sided similarity.⁷¹ He uses the concept *exemplar* in a different meaning from the concept “image,” which he used before. According to this division, image is the example of the imitation while the example is that which is imitated.⁷² As a last issue, Aquinas’ last concept in the context of analogy is *participio* (*isbtirāk*), which means God’s sharing His perfection with the created beings in deficient and limited form.⁷³

As is understood from the division done, Aquinas takes as a base the inner or outer quality which is shared among beings, in the process of the predication of the predicated name and quality, when he talks about different types of analogy. According to the proportion of the shared quality and thus the similarity, which happens as a result, there are types of analogy. When we evaluate Aquinas’ words as a whole, we see that he does not apply a clear-cut division. Instead of that, he talks about different types of analogy, according to the relations between things among which analogy would be settled and their relations to the shared quality which they have.⁷⁴ For instance, let us examine the quality *good* that seems to be common between God and the created beings. The thing that allows analogy between two beings is the quality “good.” In an analogy that is formed according to the quality “good,” it is found most perfectly in God, while it is found in other beings in a deficient way. Thus this kind of analogy is

⁶⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, 8.5, 354.

⁷⁰ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 35, a. 1, ad. 1.

⁷¹ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 35, a. 1; id., *DV*, q. 9, 23.

⁷² Aquinas, *ST*, q. 35, a. 1, ad. 1.

⁷³ Aquinas, *Sententiae I*, d. 4, q. 11; id., *SCG*, c. 15, 23; id., *ST*, q. 17.

⁷⁴ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 20, a. 3, ad. 3; id., *CTI*, c. 27.

based on a relationship that is formed according to the presence of a quality, which is found only in one being in necessary/essential and perfect way, in other beings as a second degree. The created beings are analogically called “good,” considering the absolute goodness.⁷⁵ Thus, Aquinas points to the relationship which is based on the similarity among beings according to the common qualities between them. He also points to the one being’s partial relationship to the similar things.⁷⁶

Explaining the relationship between God and other beings with analogy which is generally based on proportion (*proportio*) and the cause-effect relationship, Aquinas does not accept the analogy which depends on the certain and direct proportion. Instead of that, he accepts the analogy which depends on the partial proportion and relationship. Stating that the relationship which allows analogy between God and the created beings is a partial relationship, Aquinas thinks that the created beings inevitably possess limited similarities to the beings which cause them.⁷⁷ Limited similarity allows the formation of the association between two things, the decrease of the distant space between them, the utterance of the shared things regarding them and, in summary, the application of analogy.⁷⁸ Aquinas states that the limited similarity does not necessitate sameness between God and the created beings. By doing that, he protects the space and the basic categorical difference between the cause and the caused.⁷⁹

As is in the *tashkik* method of Avicenna, the thing which allows all these kinds of analogy is the similarity formed by the relationship between cause and effect. Effects, to the degree that they feel the power of the cause, possess the common qualities about the cause. The proportion of the similarity and difference in effect change according to the proportion of the causality. Aquinas calls the cause which allows the similarity between the created beings and God, the Final Cause, “the analogical cause (*analogous cause*).”⁸⁰ The similarity coming from the cause-effect relationship is inevitable, when God

⁷⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 6 resp.; id., *DV*, q. 2, a. 11 resp.

⁷⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 13, a. 6; id., *DV*, q. 11, a. 2.

⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Sententiae III*, d. 6, q. 2; id., *DT*, q. 11, a. 2; id., *CTI*, c. 27.

⁷⁸ Aquinas, *DV*, q. 9, a. 12.

⁷⁹ Aquinas, *SCG*, c. 35; id., *DP*, q. 7, a. 6.

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Sententiae I*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2.

and the created beings are considered. Yet this similarity is in a limited, common, and particular form. Similarly, the heat produced by fire falls short of representing the perfect heat produced by the sun.⁸¹

2. *Tanzībī* Language (*Salb-Remotio/Negotiate*)

Analogical language has some theological problems. The most crucial one is how this perfect and transcendent being in every aspect is possible to be known with a limited and finite mind. The second important problem is how the transcendent beings are defined by a daily language which is formed according to the limited and deficient beings. In other words, which kind of language relationship does our minds form between God and the created beings, which are two in different category of being?⁸² The usage of *tanzībī* language together with analogical language is necessary, in order to eliminate these philosophical and theological concerns, and protect the difference between God and the created beings. The knowledge, which is formed according to the similarity of the created beings to God, gives us some knowledge about God. This knowledge allows us to talk about Him, too. This kind of knowledge that allows us to talk is based on the created beings, which are totally in different category. So the qualities achieved cannot be directly attributed to God, while protecting their meanings. Contrarily, the achieved knowledge must be attributable to Him. In this stage, Avicenna and Aquinas states that *tasbīkī* and *analogical* language is insufficient to describe Him. They claim that the description must be supported by *tanzībī* (*Salb-Remotio/Negotiate*) language.⁸³

The *tanzībī* language will make the deficiencies of the analogical language and the aspects which resemble the created beings negated and perfected. With al-Ghazālī's words, the *tanzībī* language is to distinguish a thing from the things with which it might be confused.⁸⁴ This is because the *tanzībī* language will revise and change the idea that God is knowable, a misconception formed by the analogical lan-

⁸¹ Aquinas, *ST*, c. 17, 27; id., *DP*, q. 14, a. 11; id., *SCG*, c. 15, 29.

⁸² Austin Marsden Farrer, *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay* (Westminster, UK: Dacre Press, 1959), 16.

⁸³ Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, 39-40; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt I*, 4.1; ʿĀṣī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-Qurʾānī*, 117-120; Aquinas, *SCG*, vol. 14.

⁸⁴ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿilm al-uṣūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 24.

guage, to the idea that God is not truly knowable. He does that by accepting that we cannot understand Him by knowing what He is, contrarily, we can only achieve some information as we know what He is not.⁸⁵ Besides, the knowledge that God does not resemble any of His creatures is an important tool for us to lead to Him. Thus the *tanzībī* language does not make God unknowable and untalkable.⁸⁶ On the contrary, the *tanzībī* language removes the possibility of reducing the fact of God to the senses. Moreover, the *tanzībī* language keeps us away from the anthropomorphic understanding of God, which is brought about, by the human-centered understanding of knowledge. It stresses that God does not share anything with the created beings and that He is unique. About the necessity of the usage of the *tanzībī* language, Avicenna says,

... The First, after *anniyya*, is qualified with the *salb* of His resemblances and the negation of all *iḍāfas* from Him. For everything is from Him but He does not share anything with that which comes from Him. He is the principle of everything but He is not something among the things that which come after Him.⁸⁷

Avicenna states that some of the qualities attributed to God while talking about Him are positive in that they provide further information about His *dbāt*, some of them are negative in that they make His *dbāt* free from what harm Him. Afterwards, he gives an example as to why the *tanzībī* language (*salb*) must be used regarding negative attributes. He puts the issue in a more concrete way:

As regards the things which are confused with the meanings of *salb*... If one says about the One, without any hesitation that He is substance, he means something different from the beings which is removed of the presence in a subject. If he says that He is one, he means the being which is removed of quantity, division with word, or an association. If he says that God is intellect, the one who has intellect and the intelligible, he means that this pure being is removed of the possibility of being confused with matter and the *iḍāfas* of matter. When he says that He is "first" (*awwal*), what is meant by this is the

⁸⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt I*, 8.5, 354; Aquinas, *SCG*, c. 14.

⁸⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.7, 367-368; id., *al-Risāla al-ʿarabiyya*, 7; al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā*, 24; id., *Kīmīyāʾ al-saʿāda* (as *Kīmīyā-yi saʿādāt*) (ed. Ḥusayn Khidīwjam; Tehran: Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī wa-Farhangī, 1382 HS.), I, 24; Aquinas, *SCG*, c. 14.

⁸⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.5, 354.

idāfa of being to all existent beings. When he says that He is powerful (*qādir*), he means that He is *Wājib al-wujūd*. He further means that the existence of other beings only happens as related to Him and comes from him in the form of *idāfa*, as is mentioned.⁸⁸

Aquinas says,

When we examine the existence of a thing, many questions emerge, in order to know the essence of that thing. However, we only know what God is not, not what God is. Similarly, we cannot think what God is, we only think what God is not.⁸⁹

The reason for both philosophers to claim that the divine substance is not reachable with positive expressions, is the fact that human mind lacks a direct understanding of the divine essence. The base for this idea is that our minds only perceive the material objects. To put it more clear, the fact that our mind perceives the form abstracting it from the existence by means of sensual experiments makes impossible the knowledge about the form, which is identical to His existence.⁹⁰ This impossibility does not allow us to perceive God as He is. Thus, instead of knowing the divine essence and define Him with positive attributes, a partial knowledge is achievable by negating the attributes which are achieved from the created beings.⁹¹

Every negative expression to be used in the context of the *tanzihī* language can be seen as a step toward differentiating Him from other beings. Every negative expression supports other negative expressions. Thus, they make Him more transcendent and us to be more close the correct knowledge about God. The more we negate thing from Him, the closer we are to the knowledge about God. To the degree that we see the difference of a thing from other thing, we can know this thing more perfect.⁹² The same applies to the things whose

⁸⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.7, 367-368.

⁸⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, q. 3.

⁹⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.5, 347-348; id., *al-Isbārāt*, 45-49, 66; Aquinas, *ST*, q. 84, a. 7; q. 3.

⁹¹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.4, 344; id., *al-Risāla al-‘arshiyya*, 7; ‘Āṣī, *al-Taḥṣīr al-Qur’ānī*, 107; Aquinas, *ST*, q. 3; John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 223; Acar, *Creation*, 69-70.

⁹² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.7, 367-368; Aquinas, *ST*, q. 3.

definitions we know. First, we know what they are (*quid est*) and then divide them into genera. After that, we add the difference of every single thing, compared to other things. So the completed knowledge of the substance is perfected.⁹³ Therefore, according to Avicenna and Aquinas, the First, which is subject of essence, is free from genus, quality, space, time, equal and partner, and thus He is not definable. The qualities which are formed according to the created beings, therefore must be attributed to Him in negative way.⁹⁴

Al-Ghazālī criticizes Avicenna's views on knowing God and talking about Him. Although he accepts the *tanzībī* language has an important function in defining God and talking about Him, he is not inclined to the *tanzībī* language as theologians and Avicenna. According to him, the *tanzībī* language does not allow talking about God without entailing some philosophical and theological problems such as agnosticism. Furthermore, it opens an unsolvable gap between the Creator and the created, and causes the religious language to be meaningless. Besides, he criticized the usage of the *tanzībī* language, stating that the being which is totally close to any positive expression, or is always defined with negative expressions is not definable and knowable with regard to his *mābiyya*.⁹⁵

We can say that al-Ghazālī's criticisms are not relevant for Avicenna and Aquinas. Both philosophers do not deal directly with the *tanzībī* language in order to talk about God, as we have stated above. Rather, only after acquiring certain knowledge about God with *tashkīkī* and analogical language and allowing talking about God, they deal with the *tanzībī* language. As stated in al-Ghazālī's criticisms towards theologians, they use the *tanzībī* language to prevent philosophical and theological problems caused by *tashkīkī* and analogical language. By using the negative language when talking about God, they aim to show that God is free from every qualities which the created beings have. However, they warn that the purpose of negating the qualities from Him must be correctly understood. The purpose of negating the quality, which is possessed by the created

⁹³ Aquinas, *SCG*, c. 14.

⁹⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.5, 354; 8.4, 347-348; id., *al-Najāt*, 287; Aquinas, *SCG*, c. 14, 25; id., *ST*, q. 3, a. 5; id., *DP*, q. 7, a. 3; id., *De Ente et Essentia*, c. 6.

⁹⁵ al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fi l-i'tiqād* (ed. 'Ali Bū Mulḥim; Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 2000), 57.

beings, is not that *God is not evil*. Contrarily, it is to show that He does not possess the quality of goodness just as the created beings possess. It is also to indicate that He is the absolute good and the source of goodness.⁹⁶

Conclusion

Avicenna, without directly aiming to develop a religious language, explains how the meaning mode and the predication of the attributes which are referred to God should be understood. Basing himself on the created beings' being limited and deficient compared to the perfection of God, he develops the method *tashkik* (positive and negative *idāfa*) in terms of the concepts *taqaddum* and *ta'akkkbur*. With the *analogical* language that he developed, Aquinas deals with the possibility of the attribution of the attributes to the divine essence. Besides he also explains how the similar and different aspects of the attributes which are attributed to God and the created beings are to be understood, in the context of the analogical language.

In order to prevent some philosophical and theological problems such as anthropomorphism, which can be caused by the methods *tashkik* and analogy – methods which are used by them to prevent the theological agnosticism –, both philosophers support the *tashkik* and analogy with the *tanzibī* language and support the view that one can talk about God. By the *tanzibī* language, they show that the problem which arises when defining and talking about God is not coming from language only. But it is coming from the functioning of our mind, too. They explain that our mind perceives the names and attributes of the created beings in deficient and limited forms. However, it falls short of perceiving the necessary/essential qualities which God possess when using the *tanzibī* language, both philosophers do not ignore the expressions with which God describes Himself. They try to show how such definitions about the divine essence and *dhāt* in religious texts should be correctly understood. Furthermore, they try to show the limit of our mind for understanding the perfect and infinite God. They also try to show the insufficiency of the daily language which is consisted of the concepts whose meanings are formed in reference to the material and composite beings.

⁹⁶ Ibn Sinā, *al-Ilābiyyāt II*, 8.6, 354-355; id., *al-Najāt*, 286-287; id., *al-Risāla al-'arsbiyya*, 7; Aquinas, *SCG*, c. 14; id., *ST*, q. 13, a. 2.

Allowing the positive theology with the attribution of the positive names and qualities, they prove that one can talk about His essence and partially indicate the transcendental and perfect essence with daily language. In order to prevent the philosophical and theological problems which can be caused by the positive theology, they try to re-shape the acquired knowledge in accordance to transcendence and perfection, in the context of the negative theology. They lean more on the negative theology than the positive theology, because of God's transcendence and unknowability. This situation was understood as their denial of the positive theology. However the fact that theological epistemologies of both philosophers that are constructed in the contexts of issues such as God's essence, knowability, the possibility of talking about Him, consist of the negative and positive theologies, prove this claim wrong.

In case it is claimed that the qualities which are attributed to God and the created beings are completely different from each other, in terms of their meanings, this means the failure of the religious language used for God. In other words, this situation means the failure of the construction of the religious language about defining God and talking about God. This is because it means that the human-centered concepts are not put back in conceptualizing and naming the qualities which are attributed to His *dhāt*. Such as the failure of the construction of a religious language which is completely autonomous, just as in mathematics. Aware of this situation, both philosophers achieve the positive knowledge which allows talking about God with *tashkīk*/analogy. Besides, they also support the view that the names and attributes which are derived from the created beings cannot be attributed to His *dhāt* in the same mode of meaning. On the one hand, they oppose the criticism that this leads to a kind of metaphysical and theological agnosticism by using analogy with the positive knowledge. On the other, they oppose the criticism that it leads to anthropomorphism with the attribution of the names and qualities of the created beings to Him, by stating that every quality attributed to him with the help of the *tanzīhī* language should be attributed in the perfect and infinite mode of meaning, thus eliminating the concerns for anthropomorphism.

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