

Eternal Possibilities: Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ8 in Avicenna's
Metaphysics of the Healing

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Abstract: Avicenna's most influential work, the *Metaphysics of the Healing*, is deeply indebted to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which is quoted and referenced throughout. This thesis investigates the influence of book Θ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*—the book concerned with the concepts of potentiality and actuality—on Avicenna's conception of these terms in his *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Šifā'*. Aristotle's most important argument in Θ is that actuality is prior to potentiality in three distinct ways: in time, in account, and in being. Avicenna likewise defends the priority of actuality over potentiality. However, this thesis will argue that Avicenna expands Aristotle's definition of priority in being, and that he modifies Aristotle's arguments in order to accommodate his equation of the notions of potentiality and possibility in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2.

Keywords: Avicenna, Aristotle, Possibility, Potentiality, Priority, Eternal

1. Introduction

It is well known that the formation of Avicenna's thought was much indebted to Aristotle. In fact, Avicenna states in the prologue to his *Šifā'*—his most comprehensive summa containing all the major philosophical disciplines—that he intends for his work to have the same content as Aristotle's. However, Avicenna did more than this; he thoroughly reordered the material he took from Aristotle, and he added many original thoughts of his own.¹ Consequently, in the past few decades, the scholarship on Aristotle's influence on Avicenna has been steadily increasing. The most important and rich publication on this topic is Amos Bertolacci's *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*.² One of the major results of Bertolacci's work is that he gives an overview of all quotations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* (*Metaphysics*) of the *Šifā'*. While Bertolacci himself provides a more thorough—and very fruitful—investigation of two books (Γ and Λ), the precise influence of all other books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* on Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Šifā'* remains unexplored.

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Book Θ appears to be a particularly fruitful case for investigation. The influence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ for the history of philosophy in the Late-Antique and Medieval period is considerable. Cornelia Schöck has demonstrated the relevance of Θ within Islamic theological and philosophical discussions about human free will and the problem of the existence of evil.³ The central problem for explaining the existence of evil—without compromising God's goodness and omnipotence—is the link between human capacity/potentiality/power to act, and the act itself. In line with this, she analyses the use of these concepts (*qūwa/qudra/Istiṭā'a*) in the formative period of Islamic philosophy, and how it shaped the establishment of these concepts in later periods and thinkers, like Avicenna; who—as I will explain further on—also links the notions of evil and potentiality.⁴ Avicenna's notion of potentiality later proved highly significant for Thomas Aquinas, who was concerned with Avicenna's conception of God as a creator.⁵

¹ Menn, Stephen, "Avicenna's *Metaphysics*," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 143.

² Bertolacci, Amos, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā': A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

³ Schöck, Cornelia, "Menschliches Handeln als Grenzziehung zwischen Mensch und Gott in der Theologie des Islam," in *Grenzen des Menschseins. Probleme einer Definition des Menschlichen*, ed. Justin Stagl and Wolfgang Reinhard (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 469-494.

⁴ Schöck, Cornelia, "Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit menschlichen Handelns. 'Dynamis' (*qūwa/qudra/ istiṭā'a*) in der Islamischen Theologie," *Traditio* 29 (2004): 79-128, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0362152900002543>.

⁵ Lizzini, Olga, "'A Mysterious Order of Possibles': Some Remarks on Essentialism and on Beatrice Zedler's Interpretation of Avicenna and Aquinas on Creation," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (2014): 237-270.

On a more narrow scope, there is specific relevance for this line of research for our understanding of Avicenna's philosophy itself. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ deals with the concepts of actuality and potentiality. The distinction between actuality and potentiality is a fundamental dichotomy throughout Aristotle's work, with several different applications, the most important of which is to explain the concept of 'change'. Yet, in Avicenna's thought, the major dichotomy is instead between necessity and possibility, which are fundamental for Avicenna's project in a way actuality and potentiality are not.⁶ This brings up several questions: why does Avicenna shift the main focus of his philosophical project towards the distinction between necessity and possibility, rather than potentiality and actuality? What role do potentiality and actuality play in his *Ilāhiyyāt*? And, what is the relation between potentiality and actuality, and possibility and necessity?

The relationship between potentiality and possibility in Avicenna's metaphysics is an issue that is not yet satisfactorily resolved in the scholarly literature. Already in Aristotle, it is unclear to what extent these concepts conflate or are to be distinguished.⁷ It has been argued by Jon McGinnis that Avicenna was the first in a long line of interpreters in the Aristotelean tradition to be able to identify and equate the concepts of possibility and potentiality, in order to solve the problem in the Neo-Platonic and early Arabic traditions of how God could be considered the cause of an eternally existing world.⁸ Yet, in further scholarly literature, there exists a tendency to distinguish between Avicenna's conception of possibility and potentiality.⁹

The aim of this article is to investigate the way in which Avicenna uses Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ in his *Ilāhiyyāt*, and to explore what this tells us about the relationship between possibility and potentiality. Avicenna's use of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ appears to be a unique case. Amos Bertollacci writes:

All the implicit quotations of Θ occur in a single chapter of the *Ilāhiyyāt*, i.e. chapter IV,2, dealing with potentiality. This is the only case in which a book of the *Metaphysics*

⁶ Menn, "Avicenna's Metaphysics," 149, fn. 14.

⁷ Fernández, José Luis, "Avoiding *Façons de Parler*: Potentiality and Possibility in Aristotle's Philosophy," *Humanities Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (2023): 66-77.

⁸ McGinnis, Jon, "What Underlies the Change from Potentiality to Possibility? A Select History of the Theory of Matter from Aristotle to Avicenna," *Cadernos de História E Filosofia da Ciência* 17, no. 2 (2007): 259-278.

⁹ Belo, Catarina, *Chance and Determinism in Avicenna and Averroes* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); McGinnis, Jon, "Making Something of Nothing: Privation, Possibility, and Potentiality in Avicenna and Aquinas," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 76, no.4 (2012): 551-575. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2012.0001>; De Haan, Daniel, *Necessary Existence and the Doctrine of Being in Avicenna's Metaphysics of the Healing* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

is quoted comprehensively and continuously (despite some differences in arrangement) in a limited portion of the *Ilāhiyyāt*.¹⁰

One of the major results from Aristotle's discussion of potentiality and actuality in Book Θ is his establishment in Θ8 that actuality is prior to potentiality. Aristotle argues that actuality is prior in three distinct ways: it is prior in an epistemological way (priority in account), in a temporal way (priority in time), and in an ontological way (priority in substance). Over half (15 out of 23) of the references Avicenna makes in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2 are to this specific chapter of Θ.¹¹

To explore this topic, I will first elaborate on the unsettled status of the relation between possibility and potentiality in Avicenna in the current scholarly literature (§2). I will then take up the main question of this article: in what way does Avicenna use the content of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ in his *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2? To answer this question, I will first describe the content of Θ, focussing on Aristotle's arguments for the priority of actuality over potentiality (§3). I will pay specific attention to his discussion of substantial priority, for which Aristotle gives two distinct arguments: one having to do with eternal entities, and a teleological argument. After giving an overview of the context of Avicenna's discussion of possibility, potentiality and priority (§4), I will discuss Avicenna's engagement—or lack thereof—with both of Aristotle's arguments (§5 and §6), and I will argue that Avicenna significantly adapts Aristotle's arguments for the substantial priority of actuality over potentiality, and that he does so because he in fact meant to identify possibility with potentiality in his *Ilāhiyyāt*.

2. State of the Art

The relation between the concepts of possibility and potentiality within the history of philosophy stretching from Antiquity to Avicenna is complicated. Within Aristotle's thought, potentiality and possibility appeared to be distinct concepts, at least to the philosophical tradition inheriting them. In *Physics* VIII.1 (251a8-b10), Aristotle links the concept of potentiality with matter, and—based on his theory of generation and change—he argues that matter is something which exists eternally. Since Aristotle explains change and generation in terms of form, matter, and privation of a form, the generation of matter would entail that there would already have had to be matter before its generation. Thus, matter cannot have come to

¹⁰ Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 355.

¹¹ Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 356.

be at some point in time, and must have existed eternally.¹² By contrast, Aristotle describes modal notions, including possibility, in terms of temporal frequency: if something always exists, it is necessary. If something never exists, it is impossible. If something exists sometimes, and at other times not, it is possible (*De Caelo* I 11-12). Thus, there is a marked difference between possibility and potentiality in Aristotle's thought: potentiality, due to its relation to matter, is associated with eternity, while possibility is opposed to eternity due to this 'temporal frequency model'.

In his early paper (2007), McGinnis describes how this discrepancy between possibility and potentiality caused interpretative problems in the later Aristotelian tradition, within the context of discussions of God's causation of the world. Aristotle had held that the world was eternal, and was in no need of an efficient cause for its existence. In *Metaphysics* Λ.6 (1072a19), he describes 'God' as an unmoved mover, who acts as a final cause for the world's motion. Aristotle's unmoved mover causes the motion of the world by acting as an object of desire, which everything in the universe strives to emulate.¹³ However, in the Neo-Platonic Aristotelian commentary tradition, God was also perceived as an efficient cause. At the same time, Neoplatonists such as Proclus accepted Aristotle's idea that the world was eternal.¹⁴ This presented a problem: how can something be both eternal—and thus equated with 'necessary' within Aristotle's temporal frequency model—and created—implying there was a time before creation at which it did not yet exist?

McGinnis presents Avicenna as a final stage in the Aristotelian tradition struggling with this problem. Avicenna does not explain 'possibility' in terms of temporal frequency, as Aristotle and almost all subsequent thinkers in this tradition did before him, but instead appears to equate possibility with potentiality in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2—the chapter of Avicenna's book on metaphysics in which all references to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ are located.¹⁵ Avicenna writes:

We call the possibility of existence the potentiality of existence. And we term the bearer of the potentiality of existence, which has the potentiality of a thing's existence, "subject," "hyle," "matter," and other [names] according to various ways of considering

¹² McGinnis, "What Underlies the Change from Potentiality to Possibility?," 261.

¹³ Bodnar, Istavan, "Aristotle's Natural Philosophy," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last edited on 24 April 2023. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-natphil/>.

¹⁴ McGinnis, "What Underlies the Change from Potentiality to Possibility?," 263.

¹⁵ McGinnis, "What Underlies the Change from Potentiality to Possibility?," 271.

[things]. Hence, every temporally originated thing is preceded by matter. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 140, IV.2.26)¹⁶

McGinnis argues that with this conclusion, Avicenna is the first thinker in the Aristotelean tradition to be able to equate possibility with potentiality, and is thus able to circumvent the problems associated with Aristotle's temporal frequency model.¹⁷ By doing so, Avicenna seems to fully equate the terms 'possibility' and 'potentiality' in his *Ilāhiyyāt*. In fact, at the beginning of the work, when describing the structure of the of the discussion to come, Avicenna writes the following:

Hence, we must, in this art, know the state of the relation of the thing and the existent to the categories — the state of privation, the state of necessity (that is, necessary existence and its conditions), and the state of possibility and its true nature (*this being the same as theoretical investigation of potentiality and actuality*).¹⁸ (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 19; I.4.1)

In this passage, Avicenna relates the distinction between actuality and potentiality directly to his fundamental distinction between necessity and possibility, and he states that the investigation of necessity and possibility is the same as investigating potentiality and actuality.

Yet, in the scholarly literature, there exists a tendency to separate these terms in Avicenna's thought. Beginning with McGinnis himself; in a later article (2012) comparing the notions of possibility, potentiality and privation in Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas, McGinnis states that for Avicenna potentiality is a subclass of possibility, and that everything that applies to his analysis of possibility, also applies to potentiality. The difference, according to McGinnis, is that Avicenna reserves the term 'potentiality' to describe things that are subject to change, perfection, or generation, whereas 'possibility'—taken in its broadest sense—refers to a mode of existence that is such that were the thing not to exist, no contradiction would follow.¹⁹ 'Possibility', then, can also describe eternal things, like angels or the celestial intelligences, while 'potentiality' cannot.

A similar distinction is made by Daniel De Haan. He argues that we should not take Avicenna's description of the structure of his metaphysical discussion to mean that Avicenna truly meant

¹⁶ Unless otherwise specified, all references to Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* are to Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ McGinnis, "What Underlies the Change from Potentiality to Possibility?," 277.

¹⁸ Emphasis added.

¹⁹ McGinnis, "Making Something of Nothing," 560.

to equate the two terms. Instead, De Haan argues that Avicenna meant to make the distinction between potentiality and actuality a fundamental distinction in his natural philosophy, while metaphysics deals with the broader distinction between possibility and necessity.²⁰ According to De Haan, the theoretical metaphysical examination of necessity and possibility goes beyond the investigation of the subordinate distinction of potentiality and actuality. Thus, strictly speaking, these two distinctions and the relative investigations of them cannot be taken to be the same.²¹

Despite these explicit—albeit brief—discussions by McGinnis and De Haan about the relation between potentiality and possibility in Avicenna, there seems to be a general tendency in the scholarly literature to separate these two terms in some way. Within an analysis of Avicenna’s conception of matter, in relation to his theory of chance, Catarina Belo makes the following remark:

The terms possible and potential are often interchangeable for Avicenna, but that which is potential has a stronger claim on existence than the mere possible. What is potential should in principle come into existence, while a mere possibility is not bound to.²²

Thus, while acknowledging that for Avicenna these terms lie very closely together, Belo does not fully equate them, despite what Avicenna’s statements in the *Ilāhiyyāt* might suggest. According to Belo, ‘possibility’ in Avicenna is truly neutral when it comes to either existing or not existing, whereas ‘potentiality’ seems to have some privileged claim with regard to coming into existence. I will come back to Belo’s description in my analysis of Avicenna’s use of Θ in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2. For now, it can be noted that her interpretation can already be considered at odds with McGinnis’ and De Haan’s interpretations that potentiality is a sub-class of possibility. If possibility is indeed the broader term, whatever could be said of potentiality should also be applicable to possibility. Yet, in Belo’s account, potentiality seems to possess something which possibility does not: some sort of teleological relation to existence.

In short, there is a lack of clarity and consensus in the scholarly literature about the relationship between possibility and potentiality in Avicenna’s thought. In this paper, I will shed new light on this topic by analysing Avicenna’s use of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Θ, and I will argue that his adaptations of Aristotle’s arguments for the substantial priority of actuality over potentiality indicate that he in fact meant to identify possibility and potentiality in his *Ilāhiyyāt*. In doing

²⁰ De Haan, *Necessary Existence*, 209.

²¹ De Haan, *Necessary Existence*, 211.

²² Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, 57.

so, I provide additional arguments in favour of McGinnis's early position, and argue against his later interpretation, as well as De Haan's and Belo's.

3. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ

Before I discuss Avicenna's arguments in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2—the chapter in which he uses book Θ, and in which he states that the possibility for existence is the potentiality for existence—, it is necessary to consider the content of book Θ itself. As mentioned, book Θ is Aristotle's most elaborate discussion of the distinction between potentiality and actuality. The distinction is alluded to throughout the *Metaphysics*, but is most extensively explored in book Θ. The discussion of *Metaphysics* Θ culminates in the claim that actuality has priority in being over potentiality, which is considered to be the main result of book Θ.²³

It is generally agreed that Θ is not a self-contained treatise, and that it should be read within the overarching structure of Aristotle's treatment of his 'first philosophy'. Yet, it should also be noted that this is not an easy thing to do, due to the large amount of disagreement about the chronological and logical relations between the different books of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and about which books are self-contained.²⁴ In book Γ Aristotle defines this first philosophy as the science of 'being as such', and states that 'being' can be considered in different ways. In books Δ7 and E2, Aristotle describes a framework for the exploration of this science by distinguishing four different ways in which being can be said: being incidentally (1), being as truth (2), being as divided into the categories (3), and being actually and potentially (4). Within book E, (1) and (2) are quickly eliminated as irrelevant for the study of being as such, while book Z and H take up the discussion of (3). Book Θ can be seen as the continuation of this exploration, by discussing the fourth and last sense of being.²⁵

In Θ1-5, Aristotle focuses on capacities related to change. In Θ1, he argues that the most important case to consider is the capacity—or power—of an agent to bring about some change in something else. All other types of capacities can be related to this central case (1046a9-11). After this, Aristotle distinguishes between active powers, which are capacities of an agent to bring about some change in something else, and passive powers, which is the capacity to be

²³ Beere, Jonathan, *Doing and Being: An Interpretation of Aristotle's Metaphysics Theta* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3; Makin, Stephen, *Aristotle's Metaphysics Book Θ* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 181.

²⁴ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ*, xix.

²⁵ Beere, *Doing and Being*, 19-20.

acted upon by something else (1046a19-29). Additionally, in $\Theta 2$ Aristotle distinguishes between rational and non-rational powers (1046a36-1046b4). Rational powers can bring about both their effect and their contrary, while non-rational powers can only bring about one thing. An example of a rational power would be the power of a doctor, who can cause both health and disease, while fire's power to heat is an example of a non-rational power.

In $\Theta 6-9$ Aristotle broadens the scope of his discussion of potentiality and actuality by looking at other instances of the potentiality-actuality schema, and examining what they have in common (1048a37). For example, Aristotle mentions the subject-matter relation as a second main application of potentiality and actuality, but he also considers incomplete-complete substances. In $\Theta 7$, he provides a broader definition of potentiality: something is potentially X if it is a suitable starting point for something that is actually X by means of some capacity (1049a5-18). The purpose of $\Theta 8$ is to establish that actuality is prior to potentiality. Aristotle considers three distinct ways in which 'priority' can be considered. This separates the discussion in $\Theta 8$ into three parts: a part dealing with priority in account (1049b12-17), a second part dealing with priority in time (1049b17-1050a3), and a third part dealing with priority in substance (1050a4-1051a2). Finally, in $\Theta 9$, Aristotle goes on to argue for the superiority of actuality, extending the discussion of actuality and potentiality into a normative context.²⁶

In the remainder of this section, I will focus on Aristotle's discussion in $\Theta 8$. I will briefly discuss his discourse on priority in time and account, after which I will focus on Aristotle's definition and defence of priority in substance, which—as I will argue—constitutes an aspect of Θ that Avicenna uses in an original way, and that he does this to accommodate the identification of potentiality and possibility.

Of the three types of priority that Aristotle discusses, the notion of priority in account is by far the easiest to grasp, and it receives the shortest treatment (1049b12-17). A definition of priority in account is given in *Metaphysics* M.2. (1077a36-b4), and entails that x is prior to y if someone can cognitively grasp x without the need to grasp y.²⁷ Aristotle's argument in $\Theta 8$ is that actuality is prior in account, because we explain what a certain potentiality is by reference to the corresponding actuality, but not vice versa. For example, we explain a builder's capacity for

²⁶ Beere, Jonathan, "Badness as Posteriority to Capacity in *Metaphysics* Theta 9," in *Evil in Aristotle*, ed. Pavlos Kontos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316676813.003>.

²⁷ Beere, *Doing and Being*, 286.

building a house by referring to an actually existing house. By contrast, in order to grasp the concept ‘house’, I need not refer to a builder’s capacity for making it.

After his discussion of priority in account, Aristotle turns to priority in time (1049b17-1050a3). This kind of priority is closely related to Aristotle’s account of natural generation, and it should not just be understood simply in terms of ‘existing earlier’.²⁸ Rather, based on the examples Aristotle gives in Θ8, priority in time should be understood with reference to some process of change, in which both the prior and posterior are stages.²⁹ One can easily imagine the way in which potentiality precedes actuality in time: before an oak tree can be an oak tree, it first has to be an acorn, which is potentially an oak tree. Thus, potentiality is prior to actuality in particular instances. To defend the temporal priority of actuality, Aristotle argues that the acorn that is potentially an oak tree, has to be preceded by another oak tree that is actual. Thus, in this way, actuality is prior in time to potentiality.

Aristotle’s discussion of priority in substance (1050a4-1051a2) is by far the longest part of Θ8. Yet, the notion of priority in substance is also the most difficult to interpret. Part of this difficulty is the fact that Aristotle does not define this type of priority within book Θ, and thus leaves us to resort to his definitions as they appear in other sections of the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle describes slightly different divisions of the various kinds of priority.³⁰ Aristotle gives an explanation of substantial priority in book Δ11 (1019a2-14) of his *Metaphysics*. Here he explains the notion in terms of ontological independence: A is prior in substance to B, as long as there can be A’s without B’s.³¹ Aristotle’s notion of substantial priority is often referred to as ‘ontological priority’, since the definition implies that actualities will be ontologically independent, whereas potentialities will be ontologically dependent on actualities.³² Additionally, there is a passage in *Categories* 12 (14a29-35 and 14b10-22) which implies a broader meaning for what is there termed ‘priority in nature’.³³ Here Aristotle speaks about things that reciprocate each other with regards to existence, but one of them being in some way the cause, and thus prior. However, this causal definition of priority in being is generally set

²⁸ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ*, 185.

²⁹ Beere, *Doing and Being*, 289-90.

³⁰ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ*, 182.

³¹ Makin, Stephen, “What Does Aristotle Mean by Priority in Substance?,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 23 (2003): 209-238.

³² Witt, Charlotte, *Ways of Being : Potentiality and Actuality in Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 81-82.

³³ Makin, “What Does Aristotle Mean by Priority in Substance?,” 210 fn. 4.

aside by commentators discussing Θ 8, because this causal notion of mutual implication is already part of Aristotle's notion of being in time.³⁴

Aristotle's discussion of ontological priority in Θ can be separated into two distinct parts: a teleological justification (1050a4-23), and a second justification concerning eternal entities (1050b6-1051a2).³⁵ Aristotle's teleological justification uses examples of the potentiality-actuality schema that are already familiar from the preceding discussion in Θ , like exercise-capacity, and matter-form. The second argument introduces a new, and slightly anomalous, instance of the potentiality-actuality schema: the relation between eternal entities to perishable beings.

Aristotle's first argument for the ontological priority of actuality over potentiality is based on the idea that there exists a teleological relationship between potentiality and actuality. Aristotle gives the example of the relationship between sight and seeing, and between a builder and the act of building (1050a10-14):

For it is not that animals have see in order that they may have sight, but they have sight so that they may see. (1050a10-11) ³⁶

Stephen Makin argues that Aristotle includes this teleological perspective, because it makes it appropriate for him to apply terms like 'interruption', 'hindrance', and 'normal outcome' to the discussion of priority.³⁷ The normal outcome of 'sight' is seeing, and if I cannot see, there is some hindrance that is preventing me to see. A teleological process has a privileged state towards which it runs in normal conditions, and the privileged state of potentiality is actually.

This notion is easiest to understand through considering one of Aristotle's examples, namely: the example of adults being ontological prior to children (1050a4-7). When we consider Aristotle's definition of ontological priority, i.e. that there can be A's without B's but not the other way around, it is difficult to see how the example of children and adults fit in. Somehow, Aristotle wants to argue that there can be adults without children, but no children without adults. This example starts to make sense when we consider the teleological relation between potentiality and actuality that Aristotle posits. The actuality of 'adult' is the end—the privileged state—of a process of generation of which 'child' is an incomplete, potential, state. By contrast,

³⁴ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 138 fn. 3.

³⁵ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 78.

³⁶ All quotations of Book Θ from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* are taken from Aristotle, *Metaphysics Θ* , transl. Stephen Makin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

³⁷ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ* , 194.

a process which would result in children, rather than adults, would be considered interrupted or hindered in some way.³⁸ The child is considered ontologically dependent on the adult, because it exists relative to the adult as end of its process of change.

The crucial point of this teleological argument is that it establishes a one-way ontological dependence of what is potentially on what is actually.³⁹ Potentialities cannot exist without actualities, because they are teleologically directed towards actuality. Every power exists ‘for the sake of’ or in relation to a specific activity. Matter exists for the sake of receiving the form. By contrast, it is entirely possible for Aristotle for there to be actualities without potentialities. The form ‘adult’ does not exist for the sake of the form ‘child’, and ‘sight’ does not exist for the sake of seeing. Being actually is not intrinsically something relational, or dependent on a potentiality, in the same way that a potentiality is related to an actuality. Thus, actuality is ontological prior to potentiality.

In addition to capacity-exercise, Aristotle applies this teleological notion to the instance of matter-form:

The matter is potentially because it may go to the form; and at any rate whenever it is actually, then it is the form. (1050a15-16)

For Aristotle, form is the privileged state towards which matter is directed. In *Physics* I.9, Aristotle makes this teleological relation even more explicit:

What strives for the form must be the matter. It is as though the female strove to be male or the ugly to be beautiful.⁴⁰ (192a16-25)

In the case of the matter-form instance, matter can be considered something that is explicitly striving for form. It is difficult to explain more concretely what Aristotle means by this. As I will show later, Avicenna himself had difficulty interpreting Aristotle’s exact meaning. For now, it is enough to note that Aristotle’s teleological justification for the ontological priority of actuality is applicable to multiple instances of the potentiality-actuality schema, including matter and form.

Aristotle’s second argument for the ontological priority of actuality introduces a new instance of the schema, one that breaks with the teleological relation just established: the relation between eternal beings, and perishable ones (1050b6-1051a2). The contrast drawn is between

³⁸ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ*, 195.

³⁹ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 87.

⁴⁰ Translation taken from McGinnis “Making Something of Nothing,” 556.

eternal, necessary beings that do not perish and are completely actual, and beings that can perish, which are contingent.⁴¹ Aristotle refers to this instance of priority as a “more proper way” (1050b6), although it is unclear why he does so.⁴² Aristotle’s goal is to clarify that in this instance of the potentiality-actuality schema, actuality is prior to potentiality as well.

Aristotle’s discussion of the priority of eternal beings can be summarized with two claims:⁴³

1. Eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things (1050b6-8) and
2. Nothing eternal exists potentially (1050b8-18).

An argument in support of claim 1 would entail two argumentative steps: a) that eternal beings can exist without perishable beings, and b) that perishable beings cannot exist without eternal beings. Although Aristotle does not explicitly give proof for either claim a) or b) in his discussion of $\Theta 8$, there is consensus among commentators that he does not think these claims need support within the discussion of Θ , because for him something’s being eternal has modal force.⁴⁴ As mentioned before, in Aristotle’s temporal frequency model of modality, if something exists at all times, i.e. eternally, it is necessary. Thus, eternal beings must exist, and cannot fail to exist. Perishable beings, by definition, can fail to exist, which makes it entirely implicitly possible for there to be eternal beings without perishable ones, while it is impossible that perishable beings can exist without necessary eternal beings.

Aristotle’s argument about eternal beings is almost entirely in support of claim 2, which locates eternal beings on the ‘actuality’ side of the dichotomy, and perishable beings on the ‘potentiality’ side.⁴⁵ Claim 2 also entails an important break from the potentiality-actuality schema as thus far presented. Whereas in the first part of Aristotle’s argument, actuality was teleologically related to potentiality as its end, between eternal and perishable beings no such relation exists: perishable beings are not described as existing for the sake of eternal beings.⁴⁶ Eternal beings are actualities that are not exercises of underlying capacities: they are not relative to any potentialities.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 90.

⁴² Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ* , 208.

⁴³ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ* , 208.

⁴⁴ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ* , 209, and Witt, *Ways of Being*, 91-92.

⁴⁵ Aristotle’s attitude to this claim in other works is not completely clear. For example, in *Physics* 8.10, Aristotle describes the unmoved mover as possessing an infinite potentiality, see Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ* , 210.

⁴⁶ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 90-91.

⁴⁷ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ* , 210.

The bulk of Aristotle's argument for claim 2 is an argument to prove that something that exists potentially can fail to be actual, while eternal things cannot fail to be actual. Thus, satisfying his own definition for ontological priority as defined in $\Delta 11$; there can be eternal entities without perishable ones, but it is impossible for there to exist perishable entities without eternal entities. Aristotle's discussion of this argument about eternal beings lays bare an important fundamental difference between eternal beings and perishable things: the actuality of perishable things is always the actualization of some underlying potential, whereas the actuality of eternal beings are not related to potentialities at all.⁴⁸

In short, Aristotle defends his thesis in $\Theta 8$ that actuality has ontological priority over potentiality with two arguments: a teleological justification, based on the idea that potentialities exist for the sake of actualities. Thus, potentialities are relationally dependent on actualities, but not the other way around. The second argument shows us that there are actualities that exists completely independently from potentialities: the eternal entities which exist necessarily, because they are always in actuality. With Aristotle's arguments about the priority of actuality over potentiality established, I will turn towards Avicenna's treatment of the topic, and his use of Θ in his discussion.

4. The Context of IV.2: Avicenna's Conception of Possibility and Priority in Substance

Before we can turn properly to Avicenna's arguments for the priority of actuality over potentiality in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2, it is necessary to consider the broader context in which he discusses this. In this section, I will elaborate on Avicenna's conception of possibility, as well as the contents of his treatment of potentiality in IV.2. Finally, I will analyse Avicenna's definition of substantial priority, which he gives in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.1.

As mentioned in §2 of this paper, Avicenna does not explain 'possibility' in terms of its temporal frequency. Instead, in *Ilāhiyyāt* I.5 Avicenna begins the main discussion of his metaphysics by identifying different divisions of existence, starting with 'possible', 'impossible, and 'necessary' as primary concepts, or 'transcendentals'. These concepts cannot be explained in more fundamental terms, and have to be defined in terms of each other (I.5.22-23). 'Possible' is simply defined as 'that which is not necessary nor impossible'. 'Necessary' is 'that which exists, and also not possible not to exist'. 'Necessary' and 'possible' are both

⁴⁸ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ* , 213.

primary notions, but Avicenna argues that ‘necessary’ is logically prior. This is because ‘necessary’ always entails existence, whereas both ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’ also convey non-existence.⁴⁹

After establishing this, Avicenna’s next step is to elaborate on the distinction between ‘possibility’ and ‘necessity’, by adding a further distinction between ‘through itself’ and ‘through another’.⁵⁰ The three-way distinction between ‘necessary in itself’, ‘possible in itself’, and ‘necessary through’ another is considered to be Avicenna’s most original contribution to Islamic Philosophy.⁵¹ For Avicenna, anything that actually exists is necessary in some way, either through itself, or through another. His most elaborate argument for this occurs in *Metaphysics* II.3 of his *Salvation*.⁵² There, he considers the state of existence of something when it is possible, and when it is actual. Once actualised, he argues, there is a change in the state of a thing’s existence. Since there are only three states of being (necessary, possible, and impossible), Avicenna poses the question of which one is applicable to this newly acquired actual state. He argues that it cannot be impossible, because then the thing would not exist, and he argues that it cannot be possible, since this would mean the changed state is the same as the old state. Thus, the possible thing, when actualised, must exist necessarily—albeit through another.⁵³

Avicenna presents God as the only existent who is necessary by virtue of his own nature. All other existents, by contrast, are possible in themselves, and only made actual and necessary through another: their cause. ‘Possibility’, then, is presented as something relative to necessary existence. A possibility for, say, an acorn to become an oak tree, can only be intellectually understood by referencing the actual existing oak tree. The phrase ‘this acorn has possibility’ is not a complete thought. It becomes a complete thought when we include its relation to an actual existing—and thus necessary—oak tree.⁵⁴ It is precisely because Avicenna defines ‘possibility’ in terms of its relation to ‘necessity’—rather than in terms of its temporal frequency, as Aristotle had done—that he is free to say that the world exists both eternally and as something which is ‘possible’ and thus caused. As mentioned in §2, the philosophical tradition after Aristotle had

⁴⁹ McGinnis, Jon, *Avicenna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 162.

⁵⁰ Bertolacci, Amos, “‘Necessary’ as Primary Concept in Avicenna’s *Metaphysics*,” in *Conoscenza e contingenza*, ed. S. Perfetti (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2008), 31-50.

⁵¹ Wisnovski, Robert, “Final and Efficient Causality in Avicenna’s Cosmology and Theology,” *Quaestio* 2, no. 1 (2002), 114-115, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.QUAESTIO.2.300461>.

⁵² Avicenna, “*The Salvation, ‘Metaphysics,’ II.1-5,*” in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, transl. Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing 2007), 211-214.

⁵³ McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 163.

⁵⁴ McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 184.

struggled to explain this, and Avicenna was the first to solve this problem, by equating possibility and potentiality.⁵⁵

Avicenna establishes this equation of possibility and necessity in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2—the discussion of which also forms the immediate context of his discussion of the priority of actuality over potentiality, and his use of Aristotle’s arguments from book Θ. In IV.2, Avicenna discusses an important question about possibility. Namely: is the possibility of all things that are not necessary in themselves something that subsists in itself, or does it subsist in something else?⁵⁶ Because Avicenna presented ‘possibility’ as a notion relative to some necessary existence, he immediately rules out that possibility is something subsisting in itself (IV.2.17). According to Avicenna, for something to be classified as a substance, nothing else should be needed to complete or understand it as such.⁵⁷ Thus, he concludes that the possibility of existence of a thing possible in itself must inhere in something else which is its subject. This subject can either be immaterial or material. Avicenna considers multiple candidates for immaterial substances that could be considered as the subject for possibility, like God and the Active Intellect, but he ultimately rejects them all.⁵⁸

After establishing this, Avicenna goes on to prove the existence of matter for all originated things. His argument starts with the simple observation that everything that exists had to be possible before its existence, since the only alternatives would be that it is necessary, and thus already existing, or impossible, in which case it could not exist (IV.2.24). Because Avicenna argued that the possibility of existence cannot be something existing in itself, and because he argues in IV.2.24 that it cannot be located in the power of the agent that causes it, he concludes that the possibility of existence must be located in matter. He first states that “we call the possibility of existence the potentiality of existence”, before confirming that this potentiality inheres in matter (IV.2.24).

Immediately after this, Avicenna turns to the question of whether actuality of potentiality is prior (IV.2.27). Just like Aristotle, Avicenna does not reiterate his definition of ‘ontological priority’ in the chapter in which he applies it to actuality and potentiality. Unlike Aristotle, he

⁵⁵ McGinnis, “What Underlies the Change from Potentiality to Possibility?,” 271.

⁵⁶ *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2 is not the only place where Avicenna discusses this question about possibility. His analysis in *Physics* III.11 is perhaps even more extensive. My analysis here is based mostly on the content of IV.2, and McGinnis’s analysis of both IV.2 and III.11, see McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 178-97.

⁵⁷ McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 184.

⁵⁸ It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse Avicenna’s arguments in full. A more extensive discussion can be found in McGinnis, “What Underlies the Change from Potentiality to Possibility?,” 274-275, and McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 188-189.

does give a definition in the chapter directly preceding it: *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.1. Since Aristotle does not define 'substantial priority' in book Θ , Avicenna does not quote Θ when discussing this type of priority in IV.1. Nevertheless, the starting point of his discussion is clearly based on Aristotle. After a preliminary, very broad definition of 'priority' and 'posteriority', Avicenna introduces the concept of ontological priority, which —although different in terminology— corresponds with Aristotle's discussion in *Categories* 12 and *Metaphysics* Δ 11:⁵⁹

They thus made the thing that has existence first prior to [a] second [thing], even if the second may not have existence and would only have it after it had belonged to [the first].
(Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 125, IV.1.5)

The first, prior thing acts as a necessary condition for the existent that is posterior, but the posterior need not exist if the second thing exists. As an example of this, Avicenna states that 'the one' is prior to all numbers. There is nothing about the existence of the number 'one' that makes it necessary for plurality to exist, but if there is a plurality, it is necessary for 'one' to exist (IV.1.5). This discussion of Avicenna's first type of priority can be easily reconciled with the ontological independence condition as described in Δ 11 —although using an example from *Categories* 12, where Aristotle presents priority in nature in causal terms. It is possible that the number 'one' can exist without the number 'two', but not the other way around: there can be A's without B's, but not B's without A's.

Yet, Avicenna also introduces a second type of ontological priority, which takes up the majority of the discussion in IV.1. Although taking the causal definition from *Categories* 12 of prior and posterior having mutual implication of existence as its starting point, Avicenna's discussion in IV.1 goes well beyond Aristotle.⁶⁰ For this second type of ontological priority, the prior thing is not only the necessary condition for the existence of the posterior, but it also necessitates it. Avicenna demonstrates this kind of priority with the example of the movement of a hand, and the movement of a key that is in the hand (IV.1.7). Both these things coexist in time, yet our mind designates the movement of the hand as the cause of the movement of the key, and assigns the motion of the hand priority in existence to the motion of the key.

Within the discussion of this second definition of ontological priority, which is more closely related to the *Categories*, Avicenna emphasises an important feature of Aristotelian causality

⁵⁹ Marmura, Michael, "Avicenna on Causal Priority," in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1981), 66.

⁶⁰ Marmura, "Avicenna on Causal Priority," 66.

expressed *Metaphysics* Δ2: the simultaneity of cause and effect.⁶¹ Avicenna defends this notion in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.1. He begins his argument with an assertion that cause and effect are related to one another by necessity, which is based on his notion that something possible in itself is in itself neutral or indifferent with respect to existence.⁶² Given that either non-existence or existence must occur to this possible thing, there must also be something that determines which of these two states will occur. Avicenna next step is to argue that a thing ‘A’ cannot be properly be called a cause of ‘B’ if the existence or non-existence of B hangs in the balance. Thus, there must be some state that differentiates between the existence or non-existence of B, and if this state exists, —satisfying all other conditions— the effect must occur necessarily.⁶³ Avicenna concludes:

Hence, with the existence of the cause, the existence of every effect is necessary; and the existence of its cause necessitates the existence of the effect. The two exist together in time, eternity, or whatever but are not together with the attainment of existence. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 127, IV.1.11)

Avicenna’s main concern in chapter IV.1 is to establish how we can distinguish a cause as prior to its effect, even when they always exist simultaneously, and the existence of one can be inferred from the existence of the other. Since cause and effect are related to one another by necessity, it is the case that if the cause exists, the effect must necessarily also exist, and vice versa.

A possible objection to this notion of priority could be that if cause and effect always exist together, and you cannot remove one from existence without the other, neither one has a proper claim to be prior to the other. With regard to this line of reasoning, Avicenna considers four meanings which the thought ‘if one exists, the other exists, and if one is removed from existence, the other is removed’ can have (IV.1.13). The correct one he describes as follows:

If the cause exists in the mind, it is a rational necessity that the effect, of which the former is its essential cause, should exist in the mind; also, “if the effect exists in the mind, the existence of the cause must likewise exist in the mind.” (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 129, IV.1.16)

⁶¹ Marmura, “Avicenna on Causal Priority,” 66.

⁶² Richardson, Kara, “Avicenna and the Principle of Sufficient Reason,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 67, no. 4 (2014): 752, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24636440>.

⁶³ Richardson, Kara, “Causation in Arabic and Islamic Thought,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last edited on 15 August 2025, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/arabic-islamic-causation/>.

After establishing this, Avicenna argues that even though both cause and effect exist together in time, they are not equal with respect to the attainment of existence:

They differ because we have supposed that the existence of the one is not rendered necessary *through* the other, but *with* the other; whereas, in the case of the second, just as we supposed its existence to be *with* the other, likewise we supposed it to be *through* the other. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 129-130, IV.1.19)

Avicenna determines that a cause and an effect, although they exist together, and one cannot think of one as not existing while the other does, are different with regards to their attainment of existence. The prior one bestows existence on the second.

Thus, Avicenna distinguishes between two types of ontological priority: the first corresponds with Aristotle's definition of substantial priority in $\Delta 11$, which he uses in $\Theta 8$. The second is based on Aristotle's broader causal definition in *Categories* 12, which is generally excluded when interpreting Aristotle's discussion in $\Theta 8$.⁶⁴ After this discussion of ontological priority in IV.1, Avicenna turns to the discussion of potentiality and actuality in IV.2. In fact, he states at the end of IV.1 that discussing potentiality and actuality, and which one of them is prior, is important for fully understanding the concepts of priority and posteriority (IV.1.20). Avicenna takes up all three types of priority that Aristotle distinguishes in $\Theta 8$ (time, account, and substance). In the next section, I will discuss Avicenna's use of Aristotle's arguments, focussing on the case of substantial priority. I will argue that Avicenna reworks Aristotle's arguments in an original way, both because Avicenna uses a broader definition of substantial priority, as defined in IV.1, and because he wants to accommodate his equation between possibility and potentiality.

5. Avicenna's Ontological Priority of Actuality: Eternal Beings

As described in §3 of this paper, Aristotle defends the substantial priority of actuality over potentiality with two distinct arguments: a teleological argument, and an argument about eternal entities. In this section, I will focus on Avicenna's use of the argument about eternal entities, which I will argue is an original and significant departure from Aristotle's thought.

After his equation of the possibility for existence with the potentiality for existence in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2.26, and the identification of matter as the substrate for this possibility, Avicenna introduces

⁶⁴ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 138 fn. 3.

the discussion of priority and posteriority in connection to the distinction between actuality and potentiality:

These sections we have offered [may] make one imagine that potentiality (in an absolute sense) precedes the act and is prior to it, not only in time. This is [a view] to which a generality of the Ancients inclined. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 140, IV.2.27)

It would make sense, given that the possibility/potentiality for existence must precede the existence of something, to conclude that potentiality is something that is prior to actuality. After giving some examples views of ancient philosophers who held this thesis, Avicenna states his own opinion on the matter:

We say: the state of affairs regarding particular things that are generated and corrupted is as they have stated. For potency [in these particular things] precedes the act in terms of a temporal precedence. As regards universal things or eternal noncorruptible things, even though [they be] particulars, whatever is in potency never precedes them at all. Moreover, after [taking into account] these conditions, potency is posterior in all respects. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 141, IV.2.28)

Before going into the content of the first part of this passage, something should be cleared up about its final statement. Whereas Marmura translates the preposition ‘ba‘da’ with ‘after’, a translation that is more representative of its meaning is ‘aside from’.⁶⁵ An alternative translation—which I will follow—is given by McGinnis and Reisman: “apart from these conditions, potentiality is posterior in every respect”.⁶⁶ Thus, before he properly starts his argument for the posteriority of potentiality, Avicenna is signalling that there are two exceptions. 1: In particular instances, potentiality precedes the act in time, like a particular acorn is prior in time to the oak tree it will eventually become. And, 2: the case of eternal entities is an exception.

Of these two exceptions, the first is perfectly in line with Aristotle’s discussion in book Θ. As shown earlier, Aristotle argues that actuality is prior to potentiality in one way, and in another way not: before someone sees, this person has to be able to see (1049b19-23). The second exception, about eternal entities, is less in line with Aristotle’s view. While Bertolacci does identify this statement of Avicenna as a reference to Aristotle’s argument for the (ontological)

⁶⁵ Avicenna, *Metaphysics of The Healing*, trans. Marmura, 141.

⁶⁶ Avicenna, “The Cure, ‘Metaphysics,’ IV.2,” in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, transl. Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing 2007), 222.

priority of eternal entities, there is an important difference in wording.⁶⁷ Aristotle states: “For eternal things are prior in substance to perishable things, and nothing eternal is potentially” (1050b6-8). As demonstrated earlier, for Aristotle eternal beings are always actual, and are not associated with potential in any way. Yet, Avicenna phrases this differently: he merely states that eternal beings are not *preceded* by potentiality, but he does not explicitly disassociate eternal beings from potentiality. I will argue in the rest of this section that Avicenna changes this part of Aristotle’s argument, because for Avicenna eternal beings are associated with potentiality, and that this potentiality is something that eternally coexists with them.

What could be the reason for Avicenna’s change to Aristotle’s formulation? The extant translations from the Arabic translations of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* do not suggest that this change in wording was already present in the translations that Avicenna most likely had available to him. The evidence we have about the Arabic translations of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* comes from Averroes’s (d. 1198) *Tafsīr*; which is his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.⁶⁸ In the *Tafsīr*, Averroes quotes directly from two translations that were present in the Arabic speaking world.⁶⁹ For lines 1060b6-8 from Θ, these translations read “and no eternal things is [*sic*] in potentiality”, and “none among the eternal [things] is in potentiality.”⁷⁰ Thus, it is most likely that Avicenna had access to an Arabic version of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, in which it was explicitly stated that eternal things are not potentially at all. This suggests that the fact that Avicenna in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2 only states that eternal beings are not preceded by potentiality is a deliberate change by Avicenna.

Moreover, a few lines later, Avicenna states:

something may well be in act without being required to have been anything in potency
—as with the eternal entities, for these are always in act. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 141,
IV.2.29)

⁶⁷ Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, 356.

⁶⁸ Averroes, *Tafsīr ma ba’d at-Tabi‘at: vol. 4*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1942).

⁶⁹ Bertolacci, Amos, “On the Arabic Translations of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15 (2005): 241, doi:10.1017/S0957423905000196.

⁷⁰ These translations are the only passage that Bertolacci singles out in his overview of Avicenna’s references to Θ, although he does not discuss them any further, see Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, 355, table 12. For the Arabic text, see Averroes, *Tafsīr*; 1197-1198.

Here, Avicenna reiterates the notion that eternal beings are not preceded by potentiality, but once again he does not make any positive statement about their relationship to potentiality. Bertolacci identifies this statement by Avicenna as a reference to Θ , which reads:

So nothing that is imperishable without qualification is potentially without qualification.
(1050b16-18)

These lines are part of Aristotle's argument about eternal entities. As described earlier, in Aristotle's temporal frequency model, eternal beings —by virtue of existing always— are necessary, and thus cannot fail to be: they are imperishable. And since potentiality for being also involves the option of not being, eternal entities cannot have potentiality either. Yet, Avicenna does not seem to uphold this. He stresses that eternal beings, because they did not come to exist at some point in time, cannot have been *preceded* by potentiality/possibility, since that would imply there was a time at which they were not actually existing. But, Avicenna does not deny —as Aristotle explicitly and repeatedly does in book Θ — that eternal things have potentiality in some way. As I will show, this potentiality is connected to their ontological status of possible-in-themselves.

There is further precedence for the idea that for Avicenna eternal beings do have potentiality. In chapter IX.4 of the *Ilāhiyyāt*, Avicenna describes the process of creation as emanation of all other beings from God, starting with the separate intellects. Although traditionally a Neo-Platonic notion, in the Arabic Islamic philosophical tradition that Avicenna was part of, the theory of emanation is based on the Aristotelean idea that God is a self-thinking intellect.⁷¹ Accordingly, Avicenna begins IX.4 by reiterating some already established ideas about God: He is necessary in himself, uncaused, and all other existents proceed from him (IX.4.1). The origination of all other existents from him is a natural concomitant of his own intellectual apprehension. God's only act is to intellectually apprehend himself. He only perceives the existence of all other things through apprehending himself as their cause (IX.4.3). From this process of self-thinking, there arises a first intellect, which is separate and distinct from God.

There are several separate Intellects according to Avicenna, but properly speaking, only the first intellect proceeds directly from God. All others come into existence through mediation.⁷² With this description, Avicenna strictly adheres to the Neoplatonic '*ex uno, unum*' principle: the idea

⁷¹ Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, 97.

⁷² Marmura, M. E., "The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani*, ed. M.E. Marmura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 175.

that from the One, only one thing can proceed.⁷³ Whereas God's intellectual activity is only self-reflective and simple, the intellectual activity of the first created intellect is complex.⁷⁴ Avicenna describes the existence of plurality in the first separate intellect as follows:

It apprehends itself intellectually and necessarily apprehends the First intellectually. Hence, there must be in it, by way of plurality, the meaning [(a)] of its intellectual apprehension of its essence as being, within its own bound, possible of existence; [(b)] of its intellectual apprehension of its necessary existence, through the First, that intellectually apprehends itself; and [(c)] of its own intellectual apprehension of the First. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 330, IX.4.11)

Thus, there is a plurality of intellectual activities present in the first intellect, which consists of three apprehensions: of itself as possible in itself (a), of itself as necessary through another (b), and an intellection of God as first existence (c). Avicenna is careful to specify that this multiplicity within the first separate intellect is not something it acquires from God, but something that belongs to it in itself (IX.4.11), through apprehending its difference from God. These three apprehensions give rise to three things: From (a) and (b) arise the body and the form (respectively) of the celestial sphere that corresponds to the intellect. From (c) the intellect directly below it comes into existence. Avicenna specifies that each successive intellect after the first has this triad of intellectual activity, until it terminates after ten spheres.⁷⁵

What is relevant here for our purposes is what Avicenna states about each intellect apprehending itself as possible in itself. He writes:

Through the nature of the possibility of existence that is realized for it, enfolded in [the act of] intellectually apprehending itself, is the existence of the corporeality of the outermost sphere, [taken as] a species. This [possibility] is the thing that has a sharing in common with potentiality. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 331, IX.4.12)

The separate intellects are possible in themselves, and only made existent and necessary through something else. Although the separate intellects exist eternally, and are not created at a point in time, they exist as possible in themselves, and thus as caused. The nature of this possibility is what they have in common with potentiality (*qūwa*).⁷⁶ Once again, Avicenna seems to equate

⁷³ Amin, Wahid, "From the One, Only One Proceeds," *Oriens* 48 (2020), 124, doi:10.1163/18778372-04801005.

⁷⁴ Lizzini, Olga, "Ibn Sina's Metaphysics," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last edited on 16 March 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-sina-metaphysics/>.

⁷⁵ Lizzini, "Ibn Sina's Metaphysics," §5.4.

⁷⁶ It should be noted that the word "possibility" is added in brackets by Marmura, and that this is strictly speaking not within the Arabic text. However, from the quoted passage it does become clear that for Avicenna,

possible existence with potentiality, and it appears as if eternal entities, like the separate intellects, also possess this state of existence. This already poses a difficulty for McGinnis's and De Haan's positions that for Avicenna potentiality is subordinate to possibility, since on their view 'potentiality' only applies to existents in the sublunary realm subject to motion and change. As this passage indicates, eternal entities, like the intelligences, are possible in themselves, and thus share in potential existence.

It is my interpretation that Avicenna does not follow Aristotle in these passages, precisely because he identifies potentiality and possibility of existence. Since for Avicenna the only thing that is fully necessary through its own nature is God, all other things must be in some sense possible, and thus in some sense potential. In addition, as McGinnis argued in his early (2007) paper, Avicenna does not define 'necessary' and 'possible' in terms of their temporal frequency, and thus has no need to hold that eternal entities are not associated with potentiality in any way.

Keeping this in mind, it makes sense that Avicenna bases much of his discussion of ontological priority on Aristotle's causal notion as expressed in *Categories 12*, rather than the ontological independence notion that is defined in $\Delta 11$ and used in Aristotle's discussion of $\Theta 8$. Avicenna's purpose in IV.1 was to defend that two things can co-exist in time and be mutually implicative, and yet still one of them be prior to the other. Exactly one chapter later, in IV.2 he needs this broader sense of ontological priority to explain how actuality can be prior to potentiality, even if the two co-exist in eternal entities. As mentioned earlier, the causal notion of substantial priority in *Categories 12* is not easy to apply to Aristotle's discussion in $\Theta 8$, because it leaves us with difficulties distinguishing between temporal (causal) priority and ontological priority. Aristotle cannot defend the substantial priority of actuality over potentiality with reference to *Categories 12*, because for him, the actuality of eternal entities and potentiality are not mutually implicative. For Avicenna, on the other hand, actuality and potentiality in eternal beings do co-exist and are mutually implicative. Thus, his use of the causal definition of ontological priority in *Categories 12* can be distinguished from priority in time, since the instances of actuality and potentiality he discussed both coexist in eternity. Neither one is temporally prior to the other.

the separate intellects are somehow related to potentiality, while for Aristotle they were not related to potentiality at all.

Accordingly, Avicenna begins his argument in IV.2 with the following:

Inasmuch as potency does not subsist in itself, it must subsist in a substance that needs to be in act. For, if it had not become actual, it would not be prepared to receive anything. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 141, IV.2.28)

Potentiality, although existing together with actuality in some cases —as with the eternal entities—, has to exist in something that is in actuality. As mentioned before, possibility and potentiality are associated with non-existence: possibility is the relative absence of something necessary. Thus, although potentiality exists *with* actuality, we suppose also that it exists *through* actuality. Likewise, in his discussion of the three-fold apprehension of the separate intellects in *Ilāhiyyāt* IX.4, Avicenna states:

Thus, inasmuch as it intellectually apprehends the First, there follows necessarily from it an intellect; and, inasmuch as in one respect [its intellection is applied] specifically to itself, there follows necessarily from it the first multiplicity in its two parts —I mean, matter and form— matter [coming to be] either through the mediation of form or through its participation, just as the possibility of existence is actualized by the actuality that parallels the form of the sphere. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 331, IX.4.12)

Avicenna likens the coming into existence of the possibility of the separate intellect to the coming into existence of matter. In *Ilāhiyyāt* II.3 and *Physics* I.2, Avicenna provides a full argument for his claim that matter only exists in so far as it is informed. Even taken absolutely, i.e. as prime matter, matter must at the very least possess the form of corporeality.⁷⁷ Likewise, the possibility of the separate intellects, only comes to be through their actualisation, because —being eternal— their possibility is not something which can temporally precede them.

Avicenna, then, expands on Aristotle's argument for the priority of actuality over potentiality from eternal entities, and makes use of a different definition of priority in being, in order to accommodate his equation between possibility and potentiality. For Aristotle, who defined 'possibility' in terms of its temporal frequency, it was not problematic to hold that eternal entities were necessary, always actual and in no way potential, and that actuality was thus prior to potentiality. In contrast, by saying that possibility for existence is the same as potentiality for existence, Avicenna has to explain the priority of actuality over potentiality in eternal beings in a different way. This is why he adds the definition of ontological priority in IV.1 to accommodate things that co-exist and are mutually implicative, yet one can still be considered

⁷⁷ McGinnis, "Making Something of Nothing," 555.

prior to the other. In eternal entities like the celestial intelligences, actuality and potentiality eternally co-exist. Yet, Avicenna defends that their possibility only comes to exist by being actualized, and thus that their potentiality exists through actuality.

6. Avicenna's Ontological Priority of Actuality: the Teleological Argument

So far I have analysed Avicenna's use of one of Aristotle's arguments for the ontological priority of actuality in $\Theta 8$; the argument about eternal entities. In this final section, I will turn to Avicenna's thoughts on Aristotle's other argument: the teleological argument. To briefly recap, Aristotle's argument is that actuality is prior to potentiality because every potentiality is teleologically directed towards an actuality, but not the other way around. The actuality corresponding with a specific potentiality is presented as the privileged state towards which the potentiality runs in normal conditions. With one exception—which I will discuss in more detail later—Avicenna does not reference Aristotle's teleological argument.⁷⁸

In my overview of Aristotle's teleological argument for the ontological priority of actuality, I specified that the teleological relationship is applicable to various instances of the potentiality-actuality schema, including the instance of form-matter. As mentioned, in *Physics* 1.9 Aristotle also states explicitly that matter desires form, the way “the female strove to be male or the ugly to be beautiful” (192a3-6).⁷⁹ Avicenna, on the other hand, explicitly disagrees with this description of the relationship between matter and form in the *Physics* part of the *Shifā'*:

In the place corresponding with the present one, there is sometimes mentioned that the material's desire for the form and its imitating the female, while the form imitates the male, but this is something I just do not understand [for the following reasons].⁸⁰
(Avicenna *Physics* I.2.21, 24)

In his argument, Avicenna considers various possibilities of what Aristotle might mean with this statement, and he ultimately rejects them all as being incoherent. In my description of Avicenna's account of emanation in the previous section, I mentioned that for Avicenna, matter is never completely devoid of form: it must at the very least possess the form of corporeality. Accordingly, Avicenna's argument against Aristotle's claim that matter desires form is that any

⁷⁸ Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 356.

⁷⁹ Translation taken from McGinnis, “Making Something of Nothing”, 556.

⁸⁰ Unless otherwise specified, all references to Avicenna's *Physics* are to Avicenna, *The Physics of the Healing*, transl. McGinnis (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2009).

positive determinations one can make of matter, like its desire for something, are due to its having a form.⁸¹ In itself, matter is nothing; it is the absence of form, just like possibility is the relative absence of some necessary existence. Avicenna concludes:

If the material [understood] absolutely were replaced with a certain material that is [already] perfected by the natural form so that, from the natural form that belongs in it, it comes to have an incitement toward that form —like, for example, earth’s moving downward and fire’s moving upward — there would be some sense to this talk, even if it attributed that desire to the active form. In an absolute sense [of the material], however, I cannot understand it. (Avicenna, *Physics* I.2.23)

Matter in itself, devoid of any form, is absolutely non-existent, and therefore cannot be considered to desire form, or be teleologically related to it. Matter, which already possesses some form, is already perfected (*istakmala*) by that form, and any other perfection it seeks, is due to the form it possesses. Thus, according to Avicenna, it makes no sense to ascribe to matter a desire for form, or to potentiality in itself a tendency to go towards actuality.

However, Bertolacci does identify a passage in IV.2 as a reference to Aristotle’s teleological justification in Θ. In IV.2, Avicenna starts his discussion of priority of actuality over potentially with arguments concerning priority in time, and substance (IV.2.28-29). In IV.2.30, he briefly discusses priority in account, in which he follows Aristotle completely. After priority in account, Avicenna makes the following statement:

Also, act is prior to potency in perfection and purpose. For potentiality is a deficiency, while actuality is a perfection. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 142, IV.2.31)

Bertolacci identified this sentence as a reference to Θ8, 1050a9-10, which reads: “And the actuality is an end, and the potentiality is acquired for the sake of this.” In these lines, Aristotle clearly states the main premise of his teleological justification: that actuality is related to potentiality as its end. Avicenna’s statement does not have the same explicitness. Once again, it is useful to look at the Arabic translation of this passage that was most likely available to Avicenna. Averroes’s *Tafsīr* quotes one translation for lines 1050a9-10, which simply reads: ‘and potency exists for the sake of [*min ’ağli*] the act, and potency exists for [*’alā*] the act.’⁸² If Avicenna indeed meant to reference Aristotle’s teleological justification with this statement, he makes significant changes to the formulation of Aristotle’s argument.

⁸¹ McGinnis, “Making Something of Nothing,” 568.

⁸² Averroes, *Tafsīr*, 1188.

However, I would like to suggest that Avicenna is not referencing Aristotle's teleological justification at all, but is rather anticipating Aristotle's arguments in Θ9, which he references a few lines later.⁸³ In Θ9, Aristotle reinforces the priority of actuality over potentiality in evaluative, normative terms, by arguing that actuality is better and more valuable than potency (1051a4-5).⁸⁴ Aristotle's general argument for this is that potentialities are capacities for contraries.⁸⁵ For example, a doctor can bring about both health and illness. In his argument, Aristotle compares 'good' instances of actualities with instances of potentialities. Good actualities are better than potentialities, since the potentialities can also result in something bad, like illness, whereas the actuality can only be good. On the other hand, potentialities are better than their corresponding 'bad' outcome (1051a15-16). Yet, Aristotle defends that actualities, taken absolutely, are better than potentialities. He does so on the basis that potentialities are teleologically related to actuality; they are directed towards an actuality as a goal. In the *Physics* (194a32-33), Aristotle argues that a goal must be good.⁸⁶ Thus, actuality is more valuable than potentiality.

Right after his statement in IV.2.31 about the priority of actuality in perfection and purpose, Avicenna begins to speak in normative terms:

The good in all things is in conjunction with being actual. Where there is evil, there is that which is potency in some respect. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 142, IV.2.31)

It was mentioned earlier in this article that —if taken absolutely— potentialities and possibilities, being something relative, cannot have anything positive ascribed to them. In the sentence right before this, Avicenna describes potentialities as deficient. In line with this Avicenna follows a long line of Neoplatonic thinkers by connecting evil with lack of being and with potentialities; a topic which is treated in chapter IX.6 of the *Ilāhiyyāt*. There, Avicenna describes 'internal evil' as a deficiency or imperfection in a thing.⁸⁷ Evil, like potentialities, are a relative absence of something else.

⁸³ Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 356.

⁸⁴ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ*, xvii.

⁸⁵ Witt, *Ways of Being*, 94.

⁸⁶ Makin, *Metaphysics Book Θ*, 224.

⁸⁷ McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 222.

Building on this, in IV.2.32, Avicenna refers to Aristotle's argument that actuality is better than potentiality in Θ9, by stating that actual good is better than the potential for good, while actual evil is worse than the potential for evil.⁸⁸ Just like Aristotle in Θ9, Avicenna situates the goodness of potentialities in between their bad and good actual outcomes. After this, —as final words of the chapter— Avicenna reiterates his conclusion that actuality is prior to potentiality by stating:

You have thus learned that, in reality, act is prior to potency and, moreover, that it is prior in terms of nobility and perfection. (Avicenna *Ilāhiyyāt*, 143, IV.2.34)

Avicenna refers back to his discussion about the priority of actuality in two parts: the first referring to his discussion of ontological priority, which he takes up in IV.2.28-29, and the second referring to his discussion from IV.2.31 onwards. This indicates that his discussion about actuality's priority in 'nobility and perfection', or 'in perfection and purpose' —as it is referred to in IV.2.31— is meant to defend the priority of actuality in a different sense than previously discussed. With this last sense of priority Avicenna uses normative language in line with Aristotle's discussion in Θ9. Actuality is prior to potentiality in the sense that it is better and more valuable than potentiality. Avicenna explicitly links this to his theory of evil: 'evil' is the relative absence of something good, just like potentiality is the relative absence of actuality.

Once again, it is my interpretation that Avicenna makes these changes in order to accommodate his equation of potentiality and possibility in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2. For, if he were to maintain that potentiality is teleologically ordered towards actuality, it would also follow that possibility is ordered towards necessity. But, as demonstrated in the first section of this article, 'possibility' for Avicenna is neutral with regards to existence; both the existence and the nonexistence of a thing require a cause why it is so. As mentioned throughout this paper, Avicenna defines possibilities not in terms of their temporal frequencies, but as the relative absence of necessity. Similarly, potentiality is something relative to actuality, and is dependent on actuality for any existence that it has.

In the case of Aristotle's example of the ontological priority of the adult over the child (1050a5-6), he needs to refer to teleological notions in order to account for the ontological priority of the end result of a process, over the incomplete stage of it. Aristotle defends the substantial

⁸⁸ Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 356.

posteriority of the child relative to the end result of the process of change. Avicenna, on the other hand, is able to defend the child's ontological posteriority by reference to the actuality of the child itself. He would argue that any potentiality this child possesses is due to the actually present —albeit incomplete— form of 'child'. This actually existing form is that in which the potentiality to become an adult inheres, and as such, the reality of the actuality is prior to the reality of the potentiality.

In short, it appears Avicenna does not endorse Aristotle's teleological arguments for the ontological priority of actuality over potentiality. Avicenna's only remark, identified by Bertolacci as a reference to Aristotle's teleological justification, does not state anything along the lines that potentiality should be related to actuality as its goal. I argued that Avicenna's statement in IV.2.31 that actuality is prior to potentiality in perfection and purpose is meant to anticipate his references in IV.2.32 to $\Theta 9$'s normative language. This, then, poses a problem for how Catarina Belo characterized Avicenna's distinction between possibility and potentiality. As described in §2 of this paper, Belo describes 'possibility' as something truly neutral with regard to coming into existence, while 'potential' had some kind of privileged teleological claim to it. But, as I argued in this section, in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2 Avicenna avoids Aristotle's teleological argument for the ontological priority of actuality, and he does so in order to accommodate his notion that possibility and potentiality are the same.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have considered Avicenna's use of Aristotle's arguments for the priority of actuality over potentiality as presented in *Metaphysics* $\Theta 8$. Aristotle's notion of substantial priority, although not defined explicitly in book Θ , is one of existential independence: A is prior to B as long as there can exist A's without B's. Aristotle defended the ontological priority of actuality with two arguments: a teleological justification, in which potentialities are presented as teleologically dependent on actuality, and an argument about eternal entities, which are eternally actual without being potential.

Avicenna, by contrast, goes far beyond Aristotle's definition; in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.1, he describes two types of ontological priority. The first is in line with Aristotle's notion as used in $\Theta 8$, while the second adds a causal dimension which is based on *Categories* 12: the prior thing is both the necessary and the necessitating condition of the posterior. I argued that in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2,

Avicenna defends the ontological priority of actuality over potentiality within the context of this second, causal type of ontological priority. Avicenna's main argument that actuality is prior than potentiality in that potentiality exists and subsist in a subject which exists actually. Thus, although potentiality and actuality co-exist in time, and always exist with each other, potentiality is considered to exist *through* actuality, while the reverse is not true.

This became apparent through Avicenna's references to Aristotle's second argument; concerning eternal beings. Whereas Aristotle argues at length that eternal beings are not associated with potentiality in any way, Avicenna changes this to 'are not preceded by potentiality'. For Avicenna, eternal entities like the separate intellects do have potentiality, that arises from their intellectual apprehension of themselves as possible in themselves (IX.4). As described at the start of this paper, there is discrepancy and unclarity in the scholarly literature on the relation between possibility and potentiality in Avicenna's philosophy. Whereas Avicenna seems to identify these two terms, there is a general tendency to distinguish them. But, the interpretations by De Haan and McGinnis (2012) that possibility is a broader term than potentiality because possibility is applicable to eternal entities whereas potentiality is not, are faced with some challenges when compared to Avicenna's changes to Aristotle's argument from Θ8 about eternal beings.

I have suggested that Avicenna's changes to Aristotle's arguments in Θ8 are made in order to accommodate his equation of possibility and potentiality in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2. Aristotle's other argument in Θ8, the teleological justification, yields a similar finding. Aristotle argues that potentiality is teleologically dependent on actuality: potentiality exists for the sake of a corresponding actuality, but not vice versa. In this way, there can exist actualities without potentialities, but not potentialities without actualities. Avicenna, on the other hand, does not appear to use this line of reasoning at all. Because he equates potentiality with possibility (IV.2.26) just two paragraphs before, stating that potentiality is teleologically related to actuality in the sense that Aristotle describes—namely; that actuality is the privileged state towards which potentiality runs in normal conditions— would also entail that possibility is related to necessity in a similar way. However, as Avicenna clearly states in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.1.9: possible things are neutral with regard to existence, and thus cannot be teleologically related to necessity in this way.

In short, a close investigation of Avicenna's use of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ in his *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2 reveals some significant differences in their conceptions about the relation between possibility and potentiality. Whereas Aristotle distinguished these terms, relating potentiality to

matter, whereas possibility was defined as ‘existing at some time’, Avicenna succeeded in equating these two terms. As Jon McGinnis argued in his early paper, with this Avicenna was able to clarify that God was related to the world as an efficient cause, while at the same time holding to the idea of the world as both eternal and possible in itself.⁸⁹ Through his reworking of Aristotle’s arguments in Θ 8, Avicenna presents us with a world of eternal possibilities.

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(Hutcheson, *System*, I.ii.7.iii–viii, 122–34).

Combined references to the translation and the original text

Authors choosing to refer to both the original language edition of a work and a translation should follow these rules:

1. Abbreviated titles must be used for each edition.
2. In any citations, the **original language version of the text should be cited first**, separated by a forward-slash from the translation. Note that there is no intervening space on either side of the forward slash.

Examples:

“Furthermore, *Dasein* is an entity which in each case I myself am” (*SZ 53/BT 78*).

Europe was in danger, Husserl said repeatedly (e.g. Hua. VI.348/*Crisis*, 299), and his aim was to secure philosophy “in times of danger” (Hua. VI.510/*Crisis*, 392).

Numbers

Inclusive numbers must be given according to the rules laid out in *Chicago* 9.63.

Examples:

3–10, 71–72, 96–117, 100–104, 1100–1113, 101–8, 808–33, 1103–4, 321–28, 498–532

Inclusive numbers **must** be conjoined with an en dash, not a hyphen: so, do this: <101–8>, not this: <101-8>.

SPECIAL ISSUES OF FORMAT

1. Authors should strive for gender neutrality in pronoun usage, following the techniques outlined in *Chicago* 5.265–66. Note that *Chicago* style permits use of the singular ‘they’ (5.265–66).
2. Variables (objects, times, persons): no quotes, italicize.
3. References to years: range **1787–90**; decade **1780s**. “’80s” is also acceptable in certain cases, e.g. “**1960s, ’70s, and ’80s.**”
4. Acronyms for titles should be italicized: *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)*; acronyms for multivolume works should not: *Kants gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe) (AA)*
5. When the original language is referenced in a quote from a text translated into English, the original language is set in italics and inside parentheses, should the original language appear outside the quote marks, but inside square brackets, should the original language appear inside the quote marks.
Example 1: “Universals are principles of cognizing [*principia cognoscendi*].”
Example 2: Heidegger distinguishes between ‘Being’ (*das Sein*) and ‘being’ (*das Seiende*).
6. **Do not use contractions!!** (e.g. “don’t do it”)
7. Abbreviations such as ‘e.g.’, ‘i.e.’, ‘viz.’ should occur in endnotes and parentheses only. In the main text, spell out ‘for example/for instance,’ ‘that is,’ ‘namely’ etc. (see *Chicago* 10.48).
8. Unlike *Chicago* style, abbreviations like ‘e.g.’ and ‘i.e.’ should not be followed by a comma in the *JHP*.
9. **Capital letters in original quotes:**
JHP AVOIDS introducing square brackets, for example, <He holds that “[t]he will is the person” (83).>
JHP PREFERS constructions that leave no doubt about the original, for example, <He holds, “The will is the person” (83).>
10. *JHP PREFERS* the active voice when possible.
11. **Do not** begin or end a quote with ellipses, and **do not** place brackets around ellipses.
Exception: Ellipses may appear at the end of a quote in cases where the sentence is deliberately incomplete (see *Chicago* 12.64). Please do not use the Microsoft Word™ ellipsis function; instead, use three spaced periods.