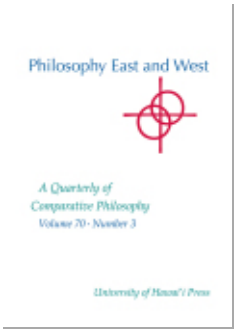
# Avicenna's Notion of *Fiṭrīyāt* : A Comment on Dimitri Gutas' Interpretation

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COMMENT AND DISCUSSION

# Avicenna's Notion of *Fiṭrīyāt*: A Comment on Dimitri Gutas' Interpretation

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## *I. Introduction*

In an illuminating article, Dimitri Gutas has tried to show that Avicenna's theory of knowledge should be understood within a full-blown empiricist framework very similar to that of John Locke.[1] Gutas' argument is based on an analysis of Avicennian 'principles of syllogism'[2] *(mabādī al-qiyās)*. The principles of syllogism are those judgments and propositions that form the irreducible and axiomatic foundations of syllogisms and definitions.[3] Avicenna categorizes these principles based on how we accept and acknowledge the truth *(taṣdīq)* of them. This categorization appears, with some slight modifications, in many places in Avicenna's oeuvre, for example in the *Kitāb al-Burhān* of *al-Šifā'*,[4] and the logic parts of *al-Naǧāt*[5] and *al-Išārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*.[6] According to *al-Naǧāt*, the principles of syllogism are divided into sixteen types based on the cognitive mechanisms through which we grasp them.[7]

Gutas' argument for his main claim has two steps: (a) he considers these different types of principles, one by one, quoting the most important texts in which Avicenna discusses each of these principles; and (b) he shows, based on his analysis of the selected quotations, that the acknowledgment of the truth of these principles is finally grounded on what we grasp from our sensory experiences *(mušāhadāt)*. More precisely, Gutas wants to show, based on the textual evidence, that we cannot acknowledge the truth of the principles of syllogism merely by the operation of our theoretical intellect and without appealing to what we obtain *non–a priori*, in the Kantian sense.[8] The conclusion is that, according to Avicenna, all sorts of human propositional knowledge have an empiricist bedrock.

No one can deny that Gutas' article, like all his other works, includes many valuable and insightful ideas. Despite this fact, I am not completely convinced by his analysis about at least some of the aforementioned principles. Specifically, what he says about the nature of the *data with built-in syllogisms (qaḍāyā qiyāsātuhā ma'ahā* or *muqaddamāt fiṭrīyāt al-qiyās*—henceforth *fiṭrīyāt)* seems implausible to me. Gutas believes that Avicennian

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*fiṭrīyāt* are *non–a priori* and analytic propositions. However, in the present article I argue that a deeper look at Avicenna's writings on *fiṭrīyāt* reveals a plausible view that is very different from Gutas' position. I try to show that, contrary to what he proposes, Avicennian *fiṭrīyāt* are *synthetic a priori*.

My article is organized as follows. The next section below presents the details of Gutas' views about *fiṭrīyāt*. I show that there is an equivocation in the term '*fiṭrīyāt*' and that it can be understood in at least three different ways (when it is employed as a property for judgments). In section III, I show that at least some *fiṭrīyāt* are *a priori* judgments. In section IV, I show, based on Kant's principal criterion for analyticity, that *fiṭrīyāt* are, contrary to what Gutas explicitly claims, *synthetic*. Section V concludes.

## *II. Gutas' Interpretation of Avicennian Fiṭrīyāt*

Gutas argues that primary data and *fiṭrīyāt* are two groups of principles of syllogism "whose necessity is internal to the soul and is imposed by the intellect."[9] The difference between them is that the truth of the former group is *directly* imposed by the intellect, while the truth of the latter group is only *indirectly* imposed by the intellect, that is, "through an operation natural" to it.[10] This natural operation is the *fiṭra* of the intellect. In fact, each of our cognitive faculties, Gutas argues, has a natural mode of operation that is its *fiṭra*. Criticizing the common understanding of *fiṭra* according to which *fiṭra* is the main source of innate knowledge, Gutas tries to show that Avicennian *fiṭra* is not an independent cognitive faculty;[11] it is merely the natural mode of the operation of our cognitive faculties.[12]

Moreover, Gutas emphasizes that Avicenna "denies innate ideas. His theory of the rational soul, well studied by now, is unambiguous. Upon birth, the newly created intellect that is associated with the body is absolutely potential, a *tabula rasa*."[13] In Avicennian epistemology, Gutas believes, "[t]he human rational soul, upon its first creation and association with the body of the newly born infant is absolutely potential, a *tabula rasa* . . . . As the child grows up and until it reaches maturity . . . , Experience *(mušāhada)* provides him with information about the world and himself."[14] He finally concludes that "[t]he function of the intellect is procedural; in itself it has no innate or *a priori* contents."[15] Gutas argues that in Avicenna's theory of knowledge there is no room for either innate propositional knowledge *(al-ilm al-taṣdīqī)* or innate concepts *(al-ilm al-taṣawwurī)*. It is worth mentioning that some pieces of our propositional knowledge, for example self-awareness, and some of our concepts, for example the concept of *existence*, have been argued by some scholars of Avicenna's philosophy to be examples of innate knowledge.[16] Yet Gutas believes that they are not really pre-given, inborn, or innate: all of them are grounded finally on what we obtain from our experiences of the external world (by sense perception) and/or our own internal world (by reflection).

Gutas quotes the following passage from *al-Naǧāt* as evidence in support of the aforementioned views about *fiṭrīyāt*:

> [The floating man can submit something to his mind and raise] a doubt about it. If he is able to doubt it, then his *fiṭra* does not attest to it; but if he is not able to doubt it, then it is something which his *fiṭra* imposes. But not everything which the human *fiṭra* imposes is true, but many of them are false. True is only the *fiṭra* of the faculty called intellect . . . . [Sometimes the *fiṭra* of estimation makes wrong judgments].[17]

Only judgments and propositions (not concepts) can be considered as *fiṭrī* in the sense expressed in this passage. This is because concepts have no truth-value and cannot be true or false. The second point that can be understood from this passage is that all *fiṭrī* judgments have some kind of psychological (or phenomenal) necessity; that is, they cannot be denied by anybody who considers them. If we accept that logical necessities are the only propositions that can neither be false nor be conceived to be false, then it follows from the passage above that the judgments imposed by the *fiṭra* of the intellect are logically necessary.[18] By contrast, the judgments imposed by the *fiṭra* of the other cognitive faculties (e.g., judgments imposed by the *fiṭra* of the estimative faculty), though seemingly true, may be false.

This shows that there is an equivocation in the term '*fiṭrīyāt*'. It seems that it can be understood in at least three different ways (when it is employed to describe a property of some judgments). According to its most general meaning, every judgment imposed by the *fiṭra* of one of our cognitive faculties is one of *fiṭrīyāt*. According to the second meaning, which is less general, only those judgments imposed by the *fiṭra* of the intellect can be considered as *fiṭrīyāt*. In this case, not only data with built-in syllogisms but also primary data (see endnote 7) should be considered as *fiṭrīyāt*. This is because both of them are imposed by the *fiṭra* of the intellect.[19] But what I refer to by the term '*fiṭrīyāt*' in this article is restricted only to the data with built-in syllogisms. This is the third and the narrowest meaning of the term '*fiṭrīyāt*' that we may have in interpreting Avicenna. As we will see, confusing these different understandings of *fiṭrīyāt* may lead us to an inaccurate analysis of the epistemic and semantic status of *fiṭrīyāt*.

What, then, is the difference between primary data and *fiṭrīyāt* (in the sense that we use this term) for Avicenna? Gutas argues that the difference is only that every primary datum can be verified just by understanding its terms (i.e., its subject/predicate or minor/major terms) without any need to construct a syllogism. But each *fiṭrīyāt* can be verified only after constructing a syllogism whose middle term will automatically appear in the mind, immediately after understanding the terms of that proposition.[20] Gutas does not believe that this difference plays any important epistemic or semantic role. He thinks that primary data and *fiṭrīyāt* have a completely similar epistemic and semantic status: both of them are *non–a priori* and "analytic,

in Kantian terms."[21] In the next two sections I will argue that this understanding of Avicenna is not tenable. More explicitly, I think both of these groups of principles of syllogism are *a priori*. However, unlike primary data (which are *analytic*), *fiṭrīyāt* are *synthetic*.[22]

## *III. Avicennian* Fiṭrīyāt *Are* A Priori

I think that Gutas' understanding of the notion of *a priority* does not correspond to the standard interpretation of this notion (at least in its Kantian sense). More precisely, it seems to me that two things are problematic with his understanding of this notion. Let me explain.

First, he thinks that the notion of *a priority* is identical to the notions of innateness and pre-givenness. Therefore, he thinks that the sufficient condition for the *non–a priority* of a concept or a judgment is for it to be not innate or given inborn. '*A priori*' for Gutas means "what we have in our soul prior to our birth." For example, he says: "In all [of its] operations the function of the intellect is procedural; in itself it has no innate or *a priori* contents."[23] Moreover, in order to argue for the *non–a priority* of principles of syllogism, Gutas refers (as his evidence) to the texts in which Avicenna says that these principles "come about" in the human intellect as a man grows up.[24] But as we will see, this picture of the connection between these notions (i.e., innateness and *a priority*) is oversimplified.

Second, Gutas reduces the *a priority* of a judgment or proposition to the *a priority* of the concepts from which that proposition is constituted. In other words, he considers every proposition constituted from *non–a priori* concepts to be a *non–a priori* proposition. For example, in order to show that the proposition 'the whole is greater than the part' (as a primary datum) is *non–a priori*, he argues just that the concepts 'the whole', 'greater', and 'part' come, through abstraction, from sensation.[25] Again, the relation between the *a priority* of a proposition and the *a priority* of its conceptual components seems to be more complicated than what we see in Gutas' picture. In the remaining of this section, I will clarify Kant's view on the notion of *a priority*. Based on that, I will show that both primary data and *fiṭrīyāt* can be considered as Kantian *a priori* judgments.

Kant uses the notion of *a priority* as a property for at least three different things: concepts, judgments, and justifications/warrants for judgments.[26] *A priority* is the property of being independent of all experiences and even of all impressions of the senses. An *a priori* concept is formed independently of all our experiences and impressions from the external world. A concept is *a priori* if it is in principle possible to have and entertain this concept without having any experience of the external world. According to this understanding of the *a priority* of concepts, a concept may be *a priori* but not innate. However, all innate concepts are *a priori*. Kant without reservation believes in innate concepts—for example time, space, and the categories.[27]

But he also believes in some other *a priori* concepts that are not innate. For example, the concepts of numbers are formed "through successive addition of units in time."[28] The concept of 'two' therefore arises from the *a priori* intuition of two successive units in time. It is not pre-given and inborn; it comes about in our intellect as we grow up. Nonetheless, Kant considers this concept to be *a priori*, since what we grasp from our experiences of the external world has no significant role in its formation. This analysis clearly shows that in order to prove the *non–a priority* of a concept it is not sufficient to argue that it is not innate and that it comes about in our mind as we grow up. A concept is *non–a priori* only if it is formed by what we obtain from our experiences of the external world. Consequently, even if, according to Avicenna, we accept that there is no innate concept, this does not necessarily mean that all concepts are *non–a priori* for him.[29] Now, does Avicenna believe that all concepts are *non–a priori* in the aforementioned Kantian sense? And even if he does, does Gutas provide sufficient reasons to show this?

Gutas does not provide any general argument to show that *all* concepts are *a priori* according to Avicenna. As I mentioned above, Gutas has argued that concepts such as 'the whole', 'greater', and 'part' come, through abstraction, from our experiences of the external world. So if his argument is sound, it entails that these concepts are *non–a priori*. But he has not shown that concepts like 'four' and 'even' are formed through the mediation of our sense-perceptual experiences; he has only said that they 'come about' in our mind as we grow up. This is definitely insufficient to show that these concepts are *non–a priori* in its Kantian sense.[30] Coming-about-in-mind is not the same notion as *non–a priority*. Moreover, I think that if we accept the condition of being independent of sense-perceptual experience as the criterion of *a priority* (instead of the innateness or not-coming-about criterion), then we should conclude that Marmura is right about the *a priority* of some primary universal concepts like 'necessity', 'thingness', and 'existence' in the framework of Avicennian philosophy.[31]

The problem goes deeper. Even if we accept that all concepts, including all conceptual components of primary data and *fiṭrīyāt*, are *non–a priori*, we cannot still conclude that these principles are *non–a priori* judgments. To clarify Kant's position on the *a priority* of judgments, we should first discuss the *a priority* of justifications. A justification for the truth of a judgment is *a priori* only if it is not based on empirical evidence that cannot be grasped without having some experience of the external world. Such a justification cannot be defeated by empirical information. Consider that a person *S* has a justification *J* for the truth of a judgment *P*. *J* is *a priori* only if its validity and plausibility are independent of the condition of the possible worlds that *S* inhabits.[32] The *a priority* of *J* is completely independent of the *a priority* of the conceptual components of *P*. It is possible for *P* to be justified by an *a priori* justification even though it contains some *non–a priori* concepts.

Consider the proposition 'bachelors are unmarried'. This is constituted from the concepts 'bachelor' and 'unmarried', which are *non–a priori* concepts since both are formed based on our experiences. But its justification is *a priori*, since after grasping and understanding its conceptual components, one would not need empirical information to acknowledge the truth of this proposition. That the *typical* example of propositions with *a priori* judgments—that is, 'bachelors are unmarried'—is constituted from *non–a priori* concepts shows how crucial it is not to confuse the *a priority* of concepts with that of justifications.

Here, again, the innateness of a judgment cannot be concluded from the *a priority* of its justification. Kant believes that all plausible justifications of all mathematical judgments are (and must be) *a priori*; but he surely does not believe that mathematical judgments are innate. As a result, that a judgment is not innate does not entail that it has a *non–a priori* justification. It indicates that the *a priority* of the justifications of primary data and *fiṭrīyāt* cannot be rejected by the mere fact that these propositions are not innate and pre-given. Quite the contrary, it seems that if we endorse the aforementioned criterion for the *a priority* of justifications, then we should say that both Avicennian primary data and *fiṭrīyāt* have *a priori* justifications. In order to acknowledge the truth of these principles no empirical information is required. After grasping the conceptual components of these judgments, we can acknowledge their truth without the aid of sense-perceptual experiences. In his discussion of the *fiṭrī* proposition 'four is even' Avicenna argues that after grasping the concepts 'four' and 'even' we do not need any further thing (which *a fortiori* includes any extra empirical information) to acknowledge the truth of the proposition that four is even: "It will be represented to everyone who understands [the concepts] 'four' and 'even' that four is even."[33] Assenting to the truth of *fiṭrīyāt* is internal to the intellect and does not depend on the empirical information we grasp through our senses. So it seems that, contrary to what Gutas suggests, according to Avicenna *fiṭrīyāt* are justified in an *a priori* way.

Now, one might object that the *a priority* of justifications and the *a priority* of judgments are two different things, and that Gutas has discussed the latter but not the former. So we should clarify Kant's position on the *a priority* of judgments. According to Kant, we have three different kinds of *a priori* judgments. All of them have *a priori* justifications. Therefore, it is not possible for a judgment to be *a priori* without having an *a priori* justification. The first group of *a priori* judgments are constituted from innate concepts (e.g., time, space, the categories). They are *pure a priori* judgments that form the categorical bases of our experiences. The second group of *a priori* judgments are constituted from *a priori*, but not innate, concepts. Mathematical judgments are the best-known representatives of this group.[34] The third group of *a priori* judgments are constituted from *non–a priori* concepts (but, as I said, they have *a priori* justifications). The proposition 'bachelors are

unmarried' is an example of such judgments. These are *impure a priori* judgments.[35]

It should be noted that Kant scholars insist that he "agrees with Locke that we have no innate knowledge, that is, no knowledge of any particular propositions implanted in us by God or nature prior to the commencement of our individual experience."[36] Therefore, the first group of aforementioned *a priori* judgments are surely not declarative propositions that acknowledge the truth of something. They just form a categorical ground or framework for understanding the world through experience.[37] This means that in the discussion of the *a priority* of declarative judgments—for example in the discussion of the *a priority* of Avicennian principles of syllogism—we should restrict ourselves to the last two groups of propositions. In this sense, it is very difficult to deny that Avicennian primary data and *fiṭrīyāt* are *a priori*. These principles, though possibly constituted from non-innate concepts, are *a priori*, since they have *a priori* justification. Now then, we can discuss the analyticity of Avicennian primary data and *fiṭrīyāt*.[38]

## *IV. Avicennian* Fiṭrīyāt *Are Synthetic*

Gutas believes that "both kinds of propositions [i.e., primary data and *fiṭrīyāt*] would be analytic, in Kantian terms."[39] I disagree. There is some evidence that Kant proposed three different definitions for the notion of analyticity.[40] One of them is based on the notion of *containment*, the second one on *contradiction*, and the last one on *amplification*. According to the first definition, a thought is *analytic* if and only if its predicate is contained in its subject. According to the second definition, a thought is *analytic* if and only if its negation is contradictory. Finally, according to the third definition, a thought is *analytic* if it is an amplification (not only a clarification). Discussing these definitions and clarifying their principal differences is beyond the scope of this article. Here, I rely on the first definition, since it has been argued, convincingly in my opinion, that it is more fundamental for Kant and that the two other definitions finally reduce to this definition.[41] Therefore my criterion for evaluating the analytic status of Avicennian primary data and *fiṭrīyāt* would be the following:

> (D) A subject-predicate judgment is *analytic* if and only if its predicate is contained in its subject. A subject-predicate judgment is *synthetic* if and only if it is not *analytic*.

This definition is based on the notions of 'subject' and 'predicate'. But it can easily be paraphrased in another way, more familiar to Aristotelian-Avicennian logicians:

> (D*) A judgment is *analytic* if and only if its major term is contained in its minor term. A judgment is *synthetic* if and only if it is not *analytic*.

Now, based on (D*), we can see that primary data are *analytic*, and *fiṭrīyāt*, contrary to Gutas' proposal, are *synthetic*. Gutas says that "[t]he difference between these propositions with built-in syllogisms and the primary ones mentioned above is that the former, according to Avicenna, can be verified by a syllogism whereas the latter require only understanding the terms of the propositions and their combination."[42] In other words, a primary judgment has no middle term but a *fiṭrī* judgment has a middle term. If a person considers a primary judgment, as soon as he understands its term he will find out that the major term is contained in the minor term. Therefore he can immediately acknowledge the truth of this proposition. This means that, based on (D*), primary data should be considered as *analytic* propositions. On the other hand, understanding the terms of a *fiṭrī* judgment is not sufficient for acknowledging its truth, as its major term is not contained in its minor term: it has a middle term. Of course, if one considers a *fiṭrī* judgment, immediately after understanding the terms of the judgment the middle term will appear in her mind by the *fiṭra* of her intellect. Then she can immediately acknowledge the truth of that proposition. But the major term of a *fiṭrī* judgment is not contained in its minor term, and this is sufficient for them to be synthetic, based on (D*).

## *V. Conclusion*

An oversimplified picture of the Kantian notions of *a priority* and *analyticity* may take us into adopting an inaccurate view about the status of *fiṭrīyāt*. Regarding the issue of *a priority*, I showed the following: (1) *A priority* and innateness are two distinct notions. Every innate concept or judgment is *a priori*, but not vice versa. Therefore, the *non–a priority* of a concept or judgment cannot be concluded from its non-innateness. (2) The *a priority* of a judgment is entirely independent from the *a priority* of its conceptual components; neither entails the other. Consequently, even if we accept that *fiṭrīyāt* are not innate and are constituted from *non–a priori* concepts, we cannot conclude that they are *non–a priori* judgments. In contrast to Gutas' view, *fiṭrīyāt* are *a priori*, since after grasping their conceptual components we can acknowledge their truth without the need to appeal to our sense perceptions of the external world. In other words, although the conceptual components of *fiṭrīyāt* may be formed *non–a priori*, their justification is *a priori*. On the other hand, *fiṭrīyāt* are synthetic, since they have a middle term and their major term is not contained in their minor term. Hence, Avicennian *fiṭrīyāt* are *synthetic a priori* in the Kantian sense.

The disagreement between empiricism and rationalism is not restricted to the issue of whether or not we have pieces of *innate* knowledge. The belief that we have innate and pre-given knowledge is sufficient but not necessary for being non-empiricist or rationalist. The real challenge between these two camps lies in the issue of how to justify (or acknowledge the truth

of) judgments. Empiricists believe that no non-analytic judgment (even after forming or grasping all of its conceptual components) can be justified *a priori*. This is what we must show regarding Avicenna's epistemology if we want to tag him as an empiricist.

*Notes*

I am thankful to Tony Street and an anonymous reviewer for this journal for extremely helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

1 – Dimitri Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," *Oriens* 40, no. 2 (2012): 391–436.

2 – In this article I follow Gutas' terminology as far as is possible and plausible.

3 – Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," p. 394.

4 – Ibn Sīnā, *al-Šifā', al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, ed. Abū l-'Alā' 'Afīfī (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-amīrīya, 1956), I.4, pp. 63–67.

5 – Ibn Sīnā, *al-Naǧāt*, ed. Muhammad Taqī Danišpažūh (Tehran: Entešārāt-e Dānešgāh-e Tehrān, 1985), pp. 112–123.

6 – Ibn Sīnā, *al-Išārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt bi-šarḥ al-Ṭūsī, al-Manṭiq* (Remarks and admonitions: With commentary by Tusi), ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1983), I.6., pp. 341–364.

7 – These types include propositions based on (1) imaginative data *(muḫayyalāt)*, (2) sense data *(maḥsūsāt)*, (3) data of reflection *(i'tibārīyāt)*, (4) tested and proven data *(muǧarrabāt)*, (5) data provided by finding the middle term of a syllogism *(ḥadsīyāt)*, (6) data provided by sequential and multiple reports *(mutawātirāt)*, (7) estimative data *(wahmīyāt)*, (8) primary data *(awwalīyāt)*, (9) data with built-in syllogisms *(qaḍāyā qiyāsātuhā ma'ahā* or *muqaddamāt fiṭrīyāt al-qiyās)*, (10) equivocal data *(mušabbahāt)*, (11) conceded or admitted data *(musallamāt or taqrīrīyāt)*, (12) absolute endoxic data *(mašhūrāt muṭlaqa)*, (13) limited endoxic data *(mašhūrāt maḥdūda)*, (14) data approved on authority *(maqbūlāt)*, (15) initially endoxic but unexamined data *(mašhūrāt fī bādī al-ra'y al-ġayr al-muta'aqqab)*, and (16) suppositional data *(maẓnūnāt)*. See Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," pp. 396–398. For two other studies on Avicenna's account of the principles of syllogism, see Deborah L. Black, "Certitude, Justification, and the Principles of Knowledge in Avicenna's Epistemology," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 120–142, and Ricardo Strobino, "Principles of Scientific Knowledge and the Psychology of (Their)

Intellection in Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Burhān*," in *Raison et Démonstration: Les Commentaires Médiévaux sur les* Seconds Analytiques, ed. Joël Biard (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2015), pp. 31–45.

8 – In the Kantian framework, *non–a priority* is equivalent to *a posteriority*. Nonetheless, Gutas prefers not to use the latter notion. He states only that the principles of syllogism are *not a priori*. To be more faithful to the subtleties of his view, I avoid using the terms '*a posteriori*' and '*a posteriority*'.

9 – Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," p. 397.

10 – Ibid.

11 – Ibid., p. 408.

12 – Ibid., p. 409.

13 – Ibid., p. 404. It can be plausibly inferred from this quotation that for Gutas something is *innate* only if we have it *upon birth*.

14 – Ibid., pp. 417–418.

15 – Ibid., p. 392.

16 – For instance, Black argues for the innateness of self-awareness. See Deborah L. Black, "Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing that One Knows," in *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition*, ed. Shahid Rahman, Tony Street, and Hassan Tahiri (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), pp. 63–87. Marmura defends the innateness and *a priority* of the concept of existence. See Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Proof from Contingency for God's Existence in the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifā'*," *Mediaeval Studies* 42 (1980): 337–352, and "Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the *Metaphysics* of his *al-Shifā'*," in *Logos Islamikos*, ed. R. M. Savory and D. A. Agius (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), pp. 219–239.

17 – Ibn Sīnā, *al-Naǧāt*, pp. 117–118. The first phrase in brackets has been added by me, the second one by Gutas.

18 – For studies on Avicenna's view regarding the connection between conceivability and metaphysical/logical modalities see, among others, Peter Adamson and Fedor Benevich, "The Thought Experimental Method: Avicenna's Flying Man Argument," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 4, no. 2 (2018): 147–164, and Taneli Kukkonen, "Ibn Sīnā and the Early History of Thought Experiments," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 52, no. 3 (2014): 433–459.

19 – See Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," pp. 398–399.

20 – Ibid., pp. 409–410. For a more detailed discussion on this feature of *fiṭrīyāt*, see Michael E. Marmura, "Plotting the Course of Avicenna's

Thought," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, no. 2 (1991): 333–342.

21 – Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," p. 410 n. 41.

22 – Here I do not discuss the details of Avicenna's account of primary propositions. For a recent study on this topic, see Seyed N. Mousavian and Mohammad Ardeshir, "Avicenna on Primary Propositions," *History and Philosophy of Logic* 29, no. 3 (2018): 201–231.

23 – Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," p. 392.

24 – See, e.g., texts [L5], [L7], [L8], and [L13] in Gutas' article.

25 – Ibid., pp. 409–410.

26 – The latter case, i.e., *a priority* of justifications, is discussed in Philip Kitcher, "A Priori Knowledge," *The Philosophical Review* 89, no. 1 (1980): 3–23.

27 – Konstantin Pollok, "The 'Transcendental Method': On the Reception of Critique of Pure Reason in Neo-Kantianism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 361.

28 – Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: With Selections from the Critique of Pure reason*, ed. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), sec. 10, p. 35.

29 – I think that there are some phrases in the texts quoted by Gutas that can be considered as evidence for the existence of some innate ideas. However, Gutas simply ignores them. For example, his text [L7] quoted from Avicenna's *al-Ta'līqāt* is: "One mode *(naḥw)* of intellects is that it is potential in all aspects, like the human intellect [i.e., the material intellect], because the intelligibles are potentially in it except the primary [intelligibles] which come about in it as he grows up." Gutas simply ignores the phrase "the intelligibles are potentially *in it*" (my italics) in this text. See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'līqāt*, ed. A. Badawī (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-miṣrīya al-'āmma li-l-kitāb, 1973), p. 27.

30 – These are conceptual components of the proposition 'four is even', which is the best-known example of Avicennian *fiṭrīyāt*. I do not claim that these mathematical concepts are *a priori*. I just emphasize that Gutas has not shown that they are *non–a priori*. Indeed, although there is textual evidence that mathematical concepts for Avicenna are *non–a priori* and cannot be formed independently from our sense-perceptual experiences, Gutas has not addressed this evidence. I have elsewhere discussed Avicenna's epistemology of mathematical concepts in detail; see Mohammad Saleh Zarepour, "Avicenna on Grasping Mathematical Concepts," Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, forthcoming. Nonetheless,

as we will see shortly, my main disagreement with Gutas' account concerns the epistemic status of *fiṭrī* propositions, rather than the epistemic status of their conceptual components.

31 – See Marmura, "Avicenna on Primary Concepts in the *Metaphysics* of his *al-Shifā'*." Gutas rejects Marmura's view (Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," p. 416 nn. 64 and 66). I think, however, that they have two different understandings of the notion of *a priority* and that Marmura's analysis is more accurate and more faithful to the Kantian sense of this notion.

32 – See Kitcher, "A Priori Knowledge," and his *The Nature of Mathematical Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

33 – Ibn Sīnā, *al-Šifā', al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 64.

34 – As I previously mentioned, mathematical concepts for Avicenna are neither innate nor even *a priori* (i.e., independent from sense perception). So his view regarding the epistemic status of mathematical concepts explicitly differs from Kant's. Nonetheless, similarly to Kant, Avicenna believes that for assenting to the truth of mathematical propositions we do not need any sense-perceptual experiences.

35 – See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): B 2–3, A 86–87/B 119, A 95.

36 – See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, editors' introduction, p. 6.

37 – If we interpret categorical judgments in this way, then they may be acceptable even for Avicenna. In fact, what Avicenna says in *al-Naǧāt* (p. 170) about the role of the intellect in forming concepts seems to me very similar to what Kant says about the role of *categories*:

> In forming concepts, sense perception and imagination . . . assist the intellect . . . . The intellect . . . discriminates among them [i.e., those things presented to the intellect by sense perception and imagery], breaks them down into parts [i.e., categories], takes up each one of the concepts individually, and arranges [in order] the most particular and the most general, and the essential and the accidental. (See text [L6] of Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," p. 406.)

38 – The moral of my discussion in this section is that the epistemic status of a proposition is not reducible to the epistemic status of its conceptual components. In particular, the epistemic source through which we form the concepts of a proposition is not necessarily identical to the epistemic source based on which we assent to the truth of that proposition. Considering the fact that the primary propositions are the first premises of which the dispositional intellect acknowledges

their truth, Gutas argues that "[t]he question of the source of knowledge by the intellect in Avicenna . . . then becomes, how the dispositional intellect arrives at the concepts which form the primary premises, and what this investigation consists of" (Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," p. 405). But as we saw, even if the conceptual elements of a proposition come from an empirical source, the proposition itself can still be *a priori*. So, contrary to what Gutas seems to suggest, the question of the source of knowledge cannot be reduced to the question of the source of concepts.

39 – Ibid., p. 410 n. 41.

40 – The evidence is extracted from Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 6–7/B 11.

41 – See, among others, Anthony Manser, "How Did Kant Define 'Analytic'?" *Analysis* 28, no. 6 (1968): 197–199; John Divers, "Kant's Criteria of the A Priori," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (1999): 17–45; and R. Lanier Anderson, "The Introduction to the Critique: Framing the Question," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 74–92.

42 – Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," pp. 409–410.

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## The Myth of a Kantian Avicenna

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In my *Oriens* article on Avicenna's empiricism (*Oriens* 40 [2012]: 391–436), I present what Avicenna calls the principles of syllogism, which are the different types of propositions that form the irreducible and axiomatic starting points of syllogisms and definitions. As Avicenna states both explicitly and implicitly in numerous passages that I cite, these are all based on experience. Two of these are the primary propositions *(awwaliyyāt)* and those with built-in syllogisms *(muqaddamāt fiṭriyyat al-qiyās)*, literally, "premises of *fiṭra* syllogisms," *fiṭra* being the natural operation of the intellect—thus, "premises whose syllogisms are constructed by the natural operation of the intellect." In his "Note" on my article, Mohammad Saleh Zarepour disagrees with me and claims that, according to Avicenna, these two propositions are not based on experience but are a priori.

To build his case, Zarepour engages in an extensive discussion of the notion of a priori, in particular that of Kant. This seems odd, for in the entire article I never discuss the concept, and the very few times that I use the term "a priori" it is never as the focus of the main argument; in particular I never use either the concept or the term in section V (pp. 404–410), where I deal with those propositions whose analysis Zarepour disputes. The reason I do not use it is because Avicenna himself never uses a term that could be so translated in his epistemological discussions: it does not appear in Avicenna, nor do I present it as appearing in Avicenna. The concepts of a-priority and a-posteriority, if one were to insist, are treated by Avicenna in totally different terms through his description of the constitution of the