



## Reexamining Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-Şiddīqīn: A Defense of the Avicennian Formulation Against the Critiques of Transcendent Philosophy

Mohammad Shafiei Mohammad Zabihi

1. PhD student, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Qom, Qom, Iran. mohammad@gmail.com
2. Professor, Department of Philosophy and Islamic Theology, University of Qom, Qom, Iran. (Corresponding Author) m-zabihi@qom.ac.ir

### Abstract

Original Research



The Proof of al-Şiddīqīn, the most rigorous argument for God's existence in Islamic philosophy, has been formulated in various ways. After Mullā Şadrā, his formulation gained prominence, while Ibn Sīnā's original version faced three main criticisms from Transcendent Philosophy: that it is purely conceptual, that it relies on the refutation of infinite regress, and that it lacks distinction from the argument from essential possibility. This article reexamines Ibn Sīnā's formulation and defends its originality and sufficiency against these critiques. Through an analytical study of his primary texts, the article demonstrates that the charge of conceptuality arises from preconceptions about Ibn Sīnā's philosophy rather than a neutral reading of his work; that the proof does not depend on refuting infinite regress; and that it is an argument from existential poverty fundamentally distinct from essential possibility. The study further shows that Ibn Sīnā's proof satisfies all four criteria of the Proof of al-Şiddīqīn: proceeding within the reality of existence, using self-evident premises, establishing the divine attributes, and requiring no appeal to divine acts. The article concludes that Ibn Sīnā's formulation does not fundamentally differ from Mullā Şadrā's and should be regarded as an authentic precursor to the proof in the fifth century AH.

### Keywords:

Peripatetic philosophy, Transcendent Philosophy, essential possibility, ontological poverty, God, Necessary Being, contingent being, infinite regress.

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## Introduction

From its inception to the present day, the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn has consistently held an unparalleled position as the most robust argument for God's existence within the Islamic philosophical tradition. The term "al-Ṣiddīqīn" was first coined by Ibn Sīnā. What distinguishes this proof from others is not only its logical rigor and its reliance on fewer premises, but also its unique methodological approach. The Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn proceeds directly from the "reality of existence" to the "necessity of existence," without requiring the mediation of contingent existents or mental concepts (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 66).

The four criteria that Ibn Sīnā sets forth for the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn reveal the reasons for the importance of this argument: attaining the necessity of existence through the reality of existence itself (and not through mental concepts), employing self-evident and certain premises, possessing the capacity to establish the attributes of the Necessary Being alongside His existence, and requiring no appeal to God's actions or effects. These criteria highlight the fundamental distinction between the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn and prior proofs, particularly the argument from essential possibility (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 66). Another advantage of this formulation is its applicability to immaterial existents (Javādī Āmulī, 2009, pp. 189–195).

Nevertheless, the post-Avicennian reading of this proof has faced serious challenges. Concerning the classification of objections raised against Ibn Sīnā's formulation of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn—setting aside those criticisms directed either at philosophical methodology in general or at arguments for God's existence that do not proceed from created beings—<sup>1</sup> the historically identifiable objections to Ibn Sīnā's formulation may be divided into two categories:

- a) Pre-Sadrian *objections*: Although these critiques are numerically abundant (al-Rāzī, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 72 ff; al-Ghazzālī, 1994, pp. 101–105), they lack sufficient qualitative strength and have therefore been dismissed over time.
- b) The objections of Mullā Ṣadrā and the adherents of Transcendent Philosophy: By raising several objections, this group has downgraded Ibn Sīnā's formulation from the status of a true Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn (Sabzevārī, n.d., p. 589; Mullā Ṣadrā, 1981, Vol. 6, pp. 26–28).

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1. For example, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī maintains that the correct path to knowing God begins with the study of creatures and is subsequently completed through spiritual discipline and mystical unveiling (Ibn al-'Arabī, 1987, p. 80).

In the present study, attention is limited to the major objections raised by Mullā Ṣadrā and the adherents of Transcendent Philosophy—objections that have remained the dominant paradigm within post-Sadrīan philosophy up to the present day. Upon examination, the most significant of these objections may be summarized under three headings: first, the claim that the proof is conceptual in nature and does not proceed within the domain of the objective reality of existence; second, the allegation that the proof requires the refutation of circularity and infinite regress; and third, the assertion that it lacks a fundamental distinction from the argument from essential possibility.

This article seeks, through an analytical approach, to examine these claims in detail. The central hypothesis of the study is that Ibn Sīnā's formulation of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn fully accords with the original criteria of the argument, and that the objections raised against him stem largely from a misunderstanding of his formulation. If this hypothesis is established, it follows that Ibn Sīnā's version of the proof does not differ in any significant way from the version later articulated by Mullā Ṣadrā. The significance of demonstrating this hypothesis lies in showing that an acceptable philosophical formulation of this important proof traces back to the fifth century AH.

To establish this claim, the first step is to reexamine Ibn Sīnā's formulations in his major works, such as *al-Mabda' wa'l-Ma'ād*, *al-Ishārāt wa'l-Tanbīhāt*, and the *Ta'līqāt*. We will then demonstrate how these formulations satisfy the four fundamental criteria of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn. Subsequently, we will analyze the principal critiques offered by the school of Transcendent Philosophy and address them by drawing upon Ibn Sīnā's own texts.

It is worth noting that the various formulations of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn have been classified into different ranks according to the number of premises they employ: the fewer the premises in a given formulation, the higher its rank. The present study, however, does not address this aspect, and objections concerning the rank or priority of certain formulations will not be analyzed. Rather, the focus will be solely on establishing the Ṣiddīqīn character of Ibn Sīnā's argument itself.

Historically, efforts have always been made to express the proof as concisely as possible, using the fewest words. For example, Sabzavārī states: "*Existence is either necessary—in which case the desired conclusion is established—or it entails the Necessary*" (Sabzavārī, 1990, p. 501). It is clear, however, that the number of words has no bearing on whether the proof qualifies as a *Ṣiddīqīn* argument, and differences in phrasing do not

affect the logical core of the proof. Indeed, Sabzavārī himself never objected to Ibn Sīnā's formulation on the grounds that it is expressed in a more extended manner.

## Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-Şiddīqīn

### A Historical Overview

The Proof of al-Şiddīqīn is considered an advanced and refined version of the argument from possibility and necessity. However, there is disagreement among scholars regarding who first articulated the logical core of the argument from possibility and necessity, irrespective of its later formulations (Muṭahharī, 2023, p. 181; Badawi, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 102; Husainzadeh, 1996, p. 34). The argument from essential possibility begins by classifying beings into the possible, the impossible, and the necessary. It maintains that if all beings were merely possible in their essences, this would entail an infinite regress of causes—a chain that, given the impossibility of both infinite regress and circular causation, could never culminate in actual existence. Since actual existence is undeniably realized, there must necessarily be a self-subsistent and independent being at the apex of the causal order (Ibn Sīnā, 1984, p. 22).

Influenced by the argument from essential possibility, Ibn Sīnā developed a distinct line of reasoning—now known as the argument from existential poverty (*imkān faqrī*)—a proof that never entered the mainstream of Western philosophy. This argument proceeds as follows: immediately after establishing the principle of “the reality of existence”—the most fundamental point of contention between philosophy and sophistry—the Necessary Existent is demonstrated through an exhaustive rational division. Any being whose existence is presupposed must be either self-sufficient and independent in its existence (i.e., not existentially dependent on any other reality) or non-self-sufficient and existentially poor (i.e., existentially dependent on another reality). If it is self-sufficient, the conclusion is established; if it is poor, then by its very existential poverty it necessarily requires a self-sufficient, independent being—without any need to refute circularity or infinite regress (Ibn Sīnā, 1984, p. 22).

The argument from existential poverty was introduced for the first time by Ibn Sīnā under the title *Burhān al-Şiddīqīn*, in accordance with the four criteria outlined earlier in the introduction (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 66). The term *şiddīq*, derived from the root *ş-d-q* (“truthfulness”) and formed on the intensive pattern *fi‘īl*, denotes one who is perpetually truthful in

both speech and conduct ("Ṣiddīq," 1992). Thus, when Ibn Sīnā named his argument "the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn," he was effectively claiming that this proof represents the mode of reasoning employed by the *ṣiddīqūn*: those who perceive existence as it truly is and who, in their knowledge of the First Principle, rely on nothing other than the very reality of existence itself.

In the Western intellectual tradition, the argument from possibility and necessity was first formulated in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas, grounded in the impossibility of circular causation and infinite regress (Aquinas, 1977, p. 13). Given the antecedents of this argument in Islamic philosophy and Aquinas's demonstrable reliance on the works of Maimonides and Ibn Rushd, it is commonly held that he adopted the argument from these two Muslim philosophers (Copleston, 1991, Vol. 8, p. 129). After a historical hiatus, Leibniz revived interest in the argument and offered a distinct formulation (Leibniz, 1996, Vol. 5, p. 127). Influenced by this new approach, the argument from essential possibility acquired a new meaning in Western philosophy. From this point onward Leibniz's formulation received greater attention, although the Thomistic version was by no means neglected (Copleston, 1991, Vol. 8, p. 129; Pearce, 2017, pp. 246-247; Rasmussen, 2010, pp. 806-819).

### The Avicennian Formulation

In *al-Ta'liqāt*, Ibn Sīnā states—without any appeal to the impossibility of circularity or infinite regress—that the reality of existence as realized extramentally falls into one of two categories: either it is of such a kind that it is dependent upon another, with that other conferring existence upon it; or existence belongs to it intrinsically, such that independence is among its intrinsic constituents. The latter is the Necessary Existent, whereas the former is the contingent existent. An existence that is dependent on another is, by its very nature, in need of that other. This intrinsic dependence is such that, were it otherwise, an inversion of its very reality would follow—namely, its reality would have to become something other than itself—which is self-evidently impossible (Ibn Sīnā, 2000, p. 261).

In *al-Mabda' wa al-Ma'ād*, Ibn Sīnā formulates the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn as follows: "There is, without doubt, an existent here; and every existent is either a Necessary Existent or a contingent existent. If it is necessary, then the Necessary Existent is established and the conclusion is attained. But if it is contingent, since every contingent must depend upon the Necessary, the Necessary Existent is thereby proven" (Ibn Sīnā, 1984, p. 22).

It is noteworthy that the term "here" (*hunā*)—a demonstrative with locative

force—in the phrase “there is, without doubt, an existent here” must be interpreted as referring to the reality of existence, not the concept of existence. This is because one of the modes of individuation is *indication*, and the point under discussion is the affirmation of external, extra-mental reality in the dispute between the philosopher and the sophist, not a mental concept. It is also worth noting that Ibn Sīnā’s formulation of the proof in *al-Najāt* corresponds exactly to what he presents in *al-Mabda’ wa al-Ma’ād*.

The formulation of the proof in *al-Ishārāt*—one of Ibn Sīnā’s final works—does not differ significantly from his other writings:

In any existent you consider, insofar as you regard it without reference to anything else, either existence is necessary for it or it is not necessary. The first type is the Necessary Existent, while the second is not impossible; for if it were impossible, it would never occur. It must therefore be possible. Thus every existent is either a Necessary Existent in itself or a contingent existent in itself (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 18).

He then concludes by stating:

Reflect on how our explanation for establishing the First Principle of existence, His oneness, and His being free of all imperfection requires nothing beyond reflection on existence itself. Although employing contingent beings or the divine acts can also serve as evidence for Him, they are not needed in this proof. This proof is the firmest and noblest proof, for existence itself indicates to existence; and this very existence, once the First Principle is established, bears witness to all other existents that follow from Him (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 66).

## **Evaluation Against the Four Criteria**

As noted in the introduction, for a proof of the Necessary Existent to qualify as a “*Ṣiddīqīn*” argument, it must satisfy four criteria. What follows is an evaluation of whether the Avicennian formulation fulfills these four requirements.

a) Deriving the necessity of existence from the very reality of existence itself

Contrary to the claim of critics—who maintain that Ibn Sīnā proceeds merely through the concept of existence—he is fully attentive to this feature,

which is among the most distinctive hallmarks of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn. He explicitly states: “every existent, when attended to ...” (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 18) and “this is an inference drawn from the condition of existence itself, namely that it entails the Necessary Being” (Ibn Sīnā, 1984, p. 23). In doing so, he affirms that the argument proceeds within the reality of existence and requires nothing beyond it to establish its conclusion. As demonstrated in Section ۷,۷, Ibn Sīnā's use of the locative demonstrative “here” (*hunā*) confirms that the proof proceeds within extra-mental reality, not at the level of mere concepts.

#### b) Reliance on self-evident and certain premises

Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn rests on three self-evident principles that require no demonstration:

**First Principle: The Principle of the Reality of Existence.** The affirmation of existence and of an extra-mental reality is self-evident and undeniable. Any attempt to deny it necessarily presupposes the acceptance of another existence (such as the act of denial or the denier himself), which results in a contradiction.

**Second Principle: The Division of Existence into the Necessary and the Possible.** By exhaustive rational division, the reality of existence—considered in terms of dependence or independence—admits only two possibilities: either its existence is intrinsic and necessary (the Necessary Existent), or its existence is from another and dependent upon another (the contingent existent). This principle rests upon a genuine logical disjunction in which the two alternatives (necessary or contingent) are both mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive: it is impossible for both to obtain together, just as it is impossible for both to be absent from a given existent.

It must be emphasized that the import of this second principle (“the reality of existence is either necessary or contingent”) is not the establishment of the Necessary Existent—lest one object that the conclusion is already contained in the second premise and the third principle becomes thus redundant. Rather, the second principle merely states that external reality cannot fall outside these two possibilities; it does not determine which of the two it actually is.

**Third Principle: The Contingent's Need for a Cause.** The proposition “the contingent is in need of a cause” is among the primary self-evident propositions. Once the intellect properly conceives the subject (the contingent) and the predicate (its need for an efficient cause), it immediately judges the truth of the proposition without requiring any mediating proof.

c) Establishing the divine attributes in addition to the divine existence

Concerning this feature, Ibn Sīnā states with regard to his Proof of the Ṣiddīqīn: “Our proof for establishing the Necessary Existent, His unity, and His being free of all imperfection requires nothing beyond reflection on existence itself” (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 66). He continues: “Once existence itself serves as evidence for the Necessary Existent, that very existence—after the First Principle is established—indicates His acts and the realities dependent upon Him as well” (Ibn Sīnā, 1984, p. 22).

The conclusion of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn is the establishment of the Necessary Existent, and the Necessary Existent signifies absolute existence, that is, existence without limitation, dependence, or any admixture of potentiality. Since absolute existence is identical with pure goodness and pure perfection, and since the Necessary Existent possesses necessity of existence from every aspect and is never in a state of potentiality or expectation regarding anything that it must acquire, the very reality of the Necessary Existent includes all perfections. As Ibn Sīnā states:

The meaning of ‘Necessary Existent in itself’ is that it is identical with necessity; that its existence belongs to it intrinsically; and that every one of its attributes is fully actual, containing no potentiality, possibility, or capacity for further completion (Ibn Sīnā, 2000, p. 55).

If a reality possesses existence necessarily and intrinsically, then that reality cannot admit multiplicity within itself. Ibn Sīnā examines this point extensively in his discussion of the divine attributes and establishes the various attributes of God in detail.

d) No appeal to the actions or effects of the Necessary Existent

The fourth feature of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn is that it establishes the existence of the Necessary Existent solely from existence itself, without appealing to any of His actions or effects. As the foregoing analysis has shown, this condition is fully met in Ibn Sīnā’s formulation.

### **A Critical Examination of Post-Ṣadrian Objections**

As noted in the introduction, the adherents of Transcendent Philosophy have advanced a number of objections to Ibn Sīnā’s formulation of the

Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn. Although all of these objections can, in one way or another, be traced back to the allegation that the proof is conceptual in nature, this study will focus specifically on three critiques that constitute the most significant objections raised by the adherents of Transcendent Philosophy: the claim that the proof is conceptual; the claim that it requires invalidating circularity and infinite regress; and the claim that it is not fundamentally distinct from the argument based on essential possibility.

### The Conceptual Nature of Ibn Sīnā's Proof

The founder of Transcendent Philosophy—to whom all later adherents of the charge that Ibn Sīnā's proof is conceptual are ultimately indebted—sets out two objections to this proof in *al-Asfār* (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1981, Vol. 6, pp. 26-28). Notably, the second objection rests upon the first, namely the claim that the proof proceeds conceptually. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, Ibn Sīnā's method is the closest approach to the true Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn, yet it does not itself qualify as such. For the criterion of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn is that it proceeds on the basis of the reality of existence, whereas Ibn Sīnā's argument, in Mullā Ṣadrā's view, proceeds only through the concept of existence.

He then continues this line of criticism by citing an objection from others—introduced with the expression *qīla* (“it has been said”)—a phrasing that signals his dissatisfaction with, and lack of full agreement regarding, the claim. The gist of what the adherents of Transcendent Philosophy maintain is that Ibn Sīnā's proof adds nothing beyond the arguments of earlier thinkers that proceed by examining the condition of contingent beings; his proof, they contend, likewise seeks to establish the Necessary Existent by considering the *conceptual status* of the contingent being, rather than through the reality of existence itself.

On the one hand, Mullā Ṣadrā does not fully accept the objection raised by others against Ibn Sīnā's proof. In addition to his use of the expression *qīla* (“it has been said”), this is indicated by his own remark that, although Ibn Sīnā's proof does not qualify as the true Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn, it nevertheless differs from the arguments of earlier thinkers and should be regarded as the closest approach to that proof. On the other hand, he explicitly describes Ibn Sīnā's proof as conceptual. The combined implication of these two claims is as follows:

1. Ibn Sīnā's so-called Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn is, in nature, the same conceptual argument advanced by earlier thinkers; and

2. this characterization is not, in his view, entirely accurate when applied to Ibn Sīnā's proof.

Here, then, arises a question: if Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn is conceptual, why, on the one hand, is the objection against him expressed in the form of "it has been said" (qīla), while on the other hand, his proof is regarded as being close to the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn? If this proof is not conceptual, then what is its flaw that leads you to count it not as the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn proper, but only as approximating it? Consequently, there appears to be an internal inconsistency between the beginning and the end of Ṣadrā's discourse. Ibn Sīnā's argument admits of only two possibilities: either it is conceptual, or it is not.

If it is said that there is a difference between considering the mere concept of possibility and intending the concept of "*an existing thing*" (as Ṣadrā himself pointed out when raising the objection), the next question arises: in any case, to which category does Ibn Sīnā's proof belong? If Ibn Sīnā's argument is constructed on the basis of the concept of possibility, then this proof—seen as no different from earlier proofs—cannot be regarded as "*the closest of the approaches to the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn.*" And if it is based on the concept of "*an existing thing*", then this proof is in fact concerned with the reality of existence itself, and the concept of "*an existing thing*" is nothing but a label for that designated reality.

Setting aside the analysis of Mullā Ṣadrā's intended meaning regarding the conceptual nature of the proof, several reasons demonstrate that Ibn Sīnā's proof is grounded in the reality of existence, not in its concept:

1. **Explicit Textual Evidence:** The aforementioned expressions and explicit statements, quoted from the books *al-Mabda' wa-al-Ma'ād*, *al-Ishārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt*, and *al-Ta'līqāt* in formulating the proof, are the clearest evidence of the existential and non-conceptual nature of Ibn Sīnā's argument. Indeed, what expression other than "this is an inference drawn from the condition of existence itself, namely that it entails the Necessary Being" (Ibn Sīnā, 1984, p. 23) or "every existent, when attended to..." (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 18) could Ibn Sīnā have used to state his non-conceptual intent more explicitly, so that no suspicion of its being conceptual would arise in his discourse?

2. **Ibn Sīnā's Own Characterization:** By evaluating his proof as distinct from other proofs for God's existence, deeming it sufficient for proving the divine attributes, and naming it the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn—that is, the proof employed by those whose speech is grounded in reality itself—Ibn Sīnā characterizes his own argument. His emphasis and explicit statements

clearly indicate that his proof is not the traditional argument from essential possibility, but rather the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn, even if we do not regard it as the highest formulation of that proof.

3. The Binary Division of Existents in the Formulation of the Proof: Ibn Sīnā's statement in al-Ishārāt is explicit: for anything that exists, its external realization is either in itself (*dhātihī*) or through another (*ghayrihī*) (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 18). It is not a tripartite division, as some have supposed, which would lead to the conclusion that his proof is conceptual. The explanation is that quiddity (*māhiyyah*), considered within the confines of the mind, either necessarily entails existence (the necessary), precludes existence (the impossible), or has no inherent requirement for either existence or non-existence (the possible). If the subject of the division were quiddity, a tripartite division would be correct. Consequently, the subject intended by Ibn Sīnā is actual existence, not quiddity.

4. The Pre-Ṣadrian Reception of the Proof: Considering the approach of pre-Ṣadrian objectors offers insight into how the proof was historically perceived and helps in understanding Ibn Sīnā's intention and, ultimately, in judging post-Ṣadrian criticisms. Among the oldest objections raised by al-Ghazālī (al-Ghazālī, 1994, pp. 101–105), or among the numerous objections of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (who raised as many as eighteen distinct criticisms regarding a single premise of Ibn Sīnā's formulation of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn) (See: al-Rāzī, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 72 ff), there is no trace of the claim that Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn was ever regarded as conceptual.

It might be objected that “the absence of any objection to the proof's conceptual nature before Ṣadrā's time is due to the fact that his predecessors considered the subject of the division to be quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and presented the division as threefold (necessary, possible, and impossible). More clearly, they took the conceptual nature of the proof for granted.” Fundamentally, the attribution of a conceptual character to Ibn Sīnā's proof stems to a large extent from a particular interpretation of his philosophy and from certain commonly held presuppositions ascribed to him (see Zabihi, 2010, pp. 128–223). Those who have regarded his ontological stance as confused and unstable have extended this same outlook to his Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn.

Yet when the works of Ibn Sīnā are studied free from this presupposition, the very attribution of such a view—and its extension to the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn—becomes untenable. The distinction between essence and existence as the cornerstone of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, as well as Suhrawardī's protracted dispute with the Peripatetics—in which he claimed that their philosophy, being founded upon existence, was inherently

unstable— (Suhrawardī & al-Rāzī, n.d., p. 189) all point to the significance of ontological discussions among earlier thinkers.

Moreover, some of them explicitly affirm an existential approach to the proof. This is evidenced by the formulation of *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* and *al-Taftāzānī*: “There is no doubt concerning the existence of an existent, and every existent is such that either its reality excludes non-being, or it does not. The former is the Necessary-in-Itself, and the latter is the possible” (al-Rāzī, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 72). Likewise, the author of *al-Mawāqif* and its commentator state: “The second approach is that of the philosophers, namely that [in reality] there is an existent...” (al-Ījī, n.d., Vol. 8, p. 5) and “there is no doubt concerning the existence of an existent.” These statements clearly and unambiguously demonstrate that these authors considered the proof to be founded upon the reality of existence and regarded the subject of the division in the proof to be the existent *qua* existent, not its mere concept.

5 .Ambiguity in What the Objectors Mean by the Proof's Conceptual Nature: It is certain that in dividing existents into the necessary and the possible, Ibn Sīnā did not intend to make the demonstration of the Necessary Existent a purely conceptual matter. Rather, he used "concept" as a pointer to what is externally designated—a point that Sabzevārī notes in his gloss on al-Asfār (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1981, Vol. 6, p. 27). Therefore, if by calling the proof "conceptual" one means that the concept serves as a pointer to reality, then this is something that even the adherents of Transcendent Philosophy must inevitably accept; for without a mental conception of the reality of existence, not only is any argument for its establishment impossible, but all discourse about it becomes fundamentally impossible.

Moreover, if by calling the proof “conceptual” what is meant is that it operates with purely mental notions, independent of extra-mental existence, then no room remains for the objection that the proof relies on an infinite regress; for an infinite regress within a purely conceptual chain of causes entails no impossibility. Therefore, the claim that the proof is conceptual is incompatible with the claim that it depends on an infinite regress.

### **Dependence on Infinite Regress**

One of the recurrent criticisms leveled by post-Ṣadrian thinkers against Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn is the claim that it depends on the refutation of circularity and infinite regress. In this study, to avoid undue prolixity and in keeping with Ibn Sīnā's own approach—who did not address the

refutation of circular causation in al-Ishārāt—<sup>1</sup> we shall limit our examination to whether the proof actually relies on disproving infinite regress. It will become clear that, by the same measure, the soundness of the proof is not contingent on the rejection of circularity either.

The root of this objection to Ibn Sīnā's argument lies in the fact that in some of his works, after presenting the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn, he proceeds to address the refutation of infinite regress. Prima facie, this gives rise to a pressing question: if the proof does not depend on disproving infinite regress, why does Ibn Sīnā, in certain treatises, engage with disproving circularity and infinite regress (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 66) and emphasize “the termination of the chain of contingents in the Necessary Being<sup>2</sup>”? Does this not imply that his proof ultimately requires the denial of infinite regress to reach its conclusion—precisely the core criticism that his critics have leveled against his formulation?

A reference to Ibn Sīnā's position in al-Ishārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt makes it clear that, in his view, the proof is independent of the assumption of an infinite regress.

By examining Ibn Sīnā's discussion in al-Ishārāt wa'l-Tanbīhāt, we find that he considers the proof to be independent of any initial hypothesis of an infinite regress. He explicitly states that the central thesis—the establishment of the Necessary Being—holds true regardless of whether the chain of beings is finite or infinite. Indeed, the refutation of infinite regress should be regarded as a consequence of this proof, not as one of its premises. A careful consideration of the proof's structure, the sequence of topics, and the manner in which Ibn Sīnā approaches the issue of regress helps to elucidate the precise relationship between the problem of infinite regress and the demonstration of the Necessary Being.

The third topic of discussion in the fourth section (*al-namat al-rābi'*) of al-Ishārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt is comprised of seven chapters, all of which address the proof of the Necessary Being and its consequent doctrines. Ibn Sīnā first introduces the topic of proving the Necessary Being with an *ishārah* (allusion), formulated as a conditional proposition: “If a First Cause exists in the chain of existence, then that Cause is the bestower of existence

1. Ṭūsī states that the reason Ibn Sīnā does not address the refutation of circularity—aside from its being self-evident—is that once the impossibility of infinite regress is established, the impossibility of circularity is thereby also proven. In other words, proving the impossibility of an infinite linear chain of causes simultaneously proves the impossibility of a closed, circular chain (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 28).

2. «فانا نبين أن الممكن ينتهي وجوده الى واجب الوجود» (Ibn Sina, 1984, p. 22).

to all existents and the cause for the actualization of all beings (composed of matter and form) in external reality” (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 17). Following this brief remark about the First Cause—presented under the heading of a *tanbīh* (notice)—he proceeds to formulate the proof for the Necessary Being by dividing external reality itself into the necessary and the contingent. As is evident, up to this point, there is no mention whatsoever of the issue of infinite regress.

What has led some commentators on Ibn Sīnā and his critics to associate the demonstration of the Necessary Being with the refutation of infinite regress is the final chapter of the fourth section (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 66). This chapter, which in a way serves as the conclusion to the preceding discussions concerning the proof of God’s existence and attributes—and ultimately names the argument the “Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn”—would naturally be positioned at the end of the section dedicated to establishing divine existence. The fact that the issue of regress is addressed in this concluding chapter has fostered the mistaken impression that the two are logically connected. Otherwise, as already shown, the core argument was fully demonstrated in the first *tanbīh* (explanatory remark) through three self-evident principles, with no reliance whatsoever on disproving either circularity or infinite regress (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 18).

It is worth noting that between the *tanbīh* in which the proof of the Necessary Being is presented (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 18) and the *tanbīh* that serves as the conclusion (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 66), other topics are discussed in addition to the issue of infinite regress—topics such as proving divine oneness, the non-corporeality of the Necessary Being, Its having neither opposite nor rival, and finally, Its being without limit. The inclusion of these subjects indicates that, by contextual reasoning, the treatment of infinite regress—like that of the other topics—should be regarded as one of the consequences flowing from the establishment of the Necessary Being’s reality. In other words, proving the aforementioned conditional proposition (i.e., establishing the First Cause) entails certain implications, one of which is the negation of infinite regress within the realm of causes in extra-mental reality.

Based on the foregoing, Ibn Sīnā’s proof in no way depends on refuting infinite regress. To dispel any possible ambiguity, consider the final passage of his statement:

“Every chain of causes and effects, whether finite or non-finite, has been shown that if it consists solely of effects, it necessarily requires a cause external to itself—though it inevitably connects to

that cause at one extremity. And it has been shown that if there is within it something which is not an effect, then that is itself the extremity and endpoint. Thus, every chain terminates in a Being Necessary through Itself” (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 27).

The main point is that Ibn Sīnā states: “Every chain of causes and effects requires a cause external to the chain itself, and it makes no difference whether such chains are finite or non-finite” (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 27). This formulation, which recurs in his other works, constitutes an explicit declaration that proving the Necessary Being does not depend on refuting infinite regress. This is because in the case of a finite chain, there is no endless, continuing series of causes and effects to begin with, whereas in the case of an infinite chain—that is, if the causal chain of contingents were assumed to be without beginning—this would still not preclude the demonstration of the Necessary Being; for the chain as a whole would itself be contingent, and the contingent necessarily requires a cause.

Consequently, the discussion of infinite regress should be regarded as one of the consequences of proving the Necessary Being, not as one of its premises. That is to say, once the Necessary Being is established, it follows logically that an ordered chain of causes and effects cannot exist as an infinite series and must necessarily have a primary cause at its origin. Whether the chain is posited as finite or infinite, this does not undermine the proof of the Necessary Being. However, after the Necessary Being is proven, it becomes evident that an actual infinite chain of causes and effects without a beginning is impossible.

Ibn Sīnā was the first to set aside the issues of circularity and infinite regress from the proof of the Necessary Being. However, a number of his commentators failed to grasp this point and have listed the rejection of circularity and regress among the premises of that proof. By contrast, the <sup>1</sup> reading of the proof by many pre-Ṣadriān thinkers does not treat it as relying on circularity or regress. The views of Suhrawardī in *al-Muṭārahāt* (Suhrawardī, 1993, Vol. 1, p. 386), Qāḍī ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī in *al-Mawāqif* (al-Ījī, n.d., Vol. 8, p. 1), ‘Allāmah al-Khafri in his *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (al-Ījī, n.d., Vol. 8, p. 11), al-Fāḍil al-Miqdād in *al-Lawāmi’ al-Ilāhiyyah* (al-Suyūrī, 2001, p. 151), and finally, the formulation of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī—which the commentator of *al-Mawāqif* considers the most concise method and the clearest proof of God’s existence—(al-Ījī, n.d., Vol. 8, p. 12) all support the

1. For example, al-Ṭūsī later adapted Ibn Sīnā’s own words into a brief formulation, stating: “If existence is necessary, then it is so; otherwise, the Necessary is entailed” (Al-Ḥillī & Al-Ṭūsī, n.d., p. 389).

correctness of the claim that the pre-Ṣadrian reception of Ibn Sīnā's proof did not treat it as dependent on refuting circularity or infinite regress.

Consider the formulation of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī: "If the Necessary Being were not existent, existence would be confined solely to the contingent. Consequently, it would necessarily follow that nothing at all would exist, for a contingent, in order to come into existence, must first receive necessity from a cause. Therefore, if a contingent is to exist, the Necessary must also exist" (al-Sayūrī, 2001, p. 151). As is clear, in this proof the existence of the contingent is made dependent upon the Necessary from the very outset—not upon some other entity, which would then raise the question of whether that entity is itself necessary or contingent.

It is worth noting that the charge of inconsistency, obscurity, or the alleged multivalence of Ibn Sīnā's expressions is, in fact, even more prevalent in Mullā Ṣadrā's own writings; yet no one permits such accusations to be leveled against him. Interestingly, in this very discussion concerning the proof of the Necessary Existent, Mullā Ṣadrā's formulation in *al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyyah* differs substantially from what appears in his other works. There he states:

In establishing the self-sufficient and necessary existence: any existent is either dependent upon another in some respect, or not dependent upon anything at all ... That which is dependent upon another requires that what sustains it itself be an existent ... If that sustaining reality subsists through itself, then the sought conclusion is established; but if it subsists through another, the discussion is transferred to that other sustaining reality, and so on, until either an infinite regress or circularity ensues, or the series terminates... (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1982, p. 35).

In this passage, Mullā Ṣadrā explicitly employs the refutation of circularity and infinite regress as part of his demonstration of the claim. There should be no doubt that if one were to consider the foregoing passages from Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadrā without identifying their authors or sources, and to approach them solely on the basis of contemporary presuppositions, one would unhesitatingly regard the passage from *al-Shawāhid al-Rubūbiyyah* as more consonant with Avicennian thought, and the formulation found in Ibn Sīnā's *al-Mabda' wa-al-Ma'ād* as more fitting for Ṣadrian philosophy.

### **Indistinction from the Argument from Essential Possibility**

One of the common distinctions drawn between Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-

Ṣiddīqīn and that of Mullā Ṣadrā is the claim that the middle term in Ibn Sīnā's proof is essential possibility, whereas in Mullā Ṣadrā's proof it is existential poverty. Like the two previous objections, this judgment arises from a particular way of interpreting Ibn Sīnā's philosophy. It remains perplexing why interpreters insist on imposing their own framework upon Ibn Sīnā's explicit statements. What has ignoring the ontological thrust of Ibn Sīnā's project achieved, if not acenturies-long delay in the advancement of ontology and its related questions?

A careful reconsideration of the foregoing discussions leaves no room for doubt that Ibn Sīnā's argument under consideration is an argument from existential poverty and differs fundamentally from the argument from essential possibility. As has been shown, Ibn Sīnā's proof is grounded in the reality of existence, and the refutation of infinite regress follows as a consequence of the necessity of existence, not as one of its premises. By contrast, the argument from essential possibility proceeds by taking quiddity as the point of division, classifying beings through a threefold division, and establishing the Necessary Existent by relying on the impossibility of circularity and infinite regress. Accordingly, Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn is entirely distinct from the argument from essential possibility.

Ibn Sīnā's own descriptions of this proof provide further evidence of its distinction from the argument based on essential possibility. By regarding this new proof as sufficient not only for establishing the Necessary Existent but also for demonstrating the divine attributes, Ibn Sīnā designated it as the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn—that is, the proof employed by those who speak in accordance with the very texture of reality itself. This designation was unprecedented among earlier Muslim philosophers and theologians. In *al-Ishārāt wa-al-Tanbīhāt*, after presenting the proof, Ibn Sīnā contrasts two methods of knowing God: the method of reasoning from effect to cause, which he attributes to “the people” (*al-qawm*), and the method of reasoning from existence itself to the necessity of existence, which he explicitly identifies as the method of the *ṣiddīqīn*. He emphatically insists on the fundamental difference between this method and the arguments of his predecessors. This insistence itself entails that his proof cannot be identified with the earlier argument from possibility and necessity.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study support the defensibility of the article's central hypothesis, namely that there is no fundamental difference between Ibn

Sīnā's formulation of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn and that of Mullā Ṣadrā. An examination of Ibn Sīnā's primary texts demonstrates that his proof satisfies all four criteria of a genuine Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn. In response to the main question of the article, it must be acknowledged that Ibn Sīnā's formulation not only bears no fundamental difference from Mullā Ṣadrā's, but can also be regarded as an authentic and credible precursor to the numerous later formulations of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn. Consequently, the most significant post-Ṣadrian objections raised against Ibn Sīnā's formulation are to be considered unfounded.

This study has further shown that the most central post-Ṣadrian objection to Ibn Sīnā's Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn—upon which other criticisms ultimately rest—is the claim that the proof is conceptual in nature. A historical analysis of the responses of thinkers preceding Mullā Ṣadrā, such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and al-Taftāzānī, indicates that they likewise understood Ibn Sīnā's formulation as grounded in the reality of existence, and that the charge of conceptuality is a comparatively late development. The present investigation also demonstrates that attributing conceptuality to Ibn Sīnā's proof stems primarily from the ontological presuppositions of his critics regarding Peripatetic philosophy, rather than from an impartial reading of the texts themselves.

In conclusion, it may be affirmed that the sound and defensible formulation of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn—today most commonly associated with the name of Mullā Ṣadrā—does not differ in any profound way from Ibn Sīnā's formulation in the fifth century AH. This finding not only enriches the philosophical legacy of Ibn Sīnā, but also significantly extends the historical roots of this important proof within the Islamic intellectual tradition. For future research, a more detailed comparative examination of this proof in the works of other Islamic philosophers, such as Mīr Dāmād, as well as a comparison with contemporary interpretations of the Proof of al-Ṣiddīqīn, may prove fruitful.

#### ▣ **Conflict of Interest**

- ▣ The authors declare no competing interests.

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