

# Ibn Sina / Avicenna (b. near Bukhara; 980-1037)

- Persian scholar, physician, and **wazīr** *[political adviser/minister]*
- Clarifies the role of logic
- Further develops Neoplatonic emanationist hierarchies
- Knew Aristotle's *Metaphysics* "by heart"
  - Problem: The Arabic name *al-ilahiyyat* means "The Divine Science," which is much broader than Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the subject of which is "being qua being." Single science? Ontology?
- Al-farabi's *On the Objects of Metaphysics* reveals that metaphysics is not focused on "theology," but rather on "being qua being." However, it does lead to the divine science (*al-ilahiyyat*).



# METAPHYSICS OF NECESSITY VS. CONTINGENCY

- Necessity – Being has to be (Aristotle)
  - >“science” – understand how and why things must be as they are
- Contingency – it need not have been (Kalam)
  - Canonizes the scriptural idea of creation
- For Avicenna, the universe consists of entirely necessitated events, with the exception of God. The world is contingent in itself, but necessary with reference to its causes, all the way back to the First Cause, The Necessary Being, The Eternal Creator.



# Avicenna's Synthesis: eternity/necessity with contingency

- Avicenna “completes” Aristotle’s understanding of physical causes as causes of motion preceding their effects
- True or metaphysical causes are simultaneous with their effects, but operate “necessarily” and by “emanation”
- “Active Intellect” (*al-‘aql al-fa‘al*) grounds sublunary causal simultaneity
- \*The world is contingent in itself but necessitated by its causes.\*



# Avicenna's Cosmological Proof (argument from contingency)

“Whatever has being must either have a reason for its being, or have no reason for it. If it has a reason, then it is contingent, [...] If on the other hand it has no reason for its being in any way whatsoever, then it is necessary in its being. This rule having been confirmed, I shall now proceed to prove that there is in being a being which has no reason for its being.

Such a being is either contingent or necessary. [...] If the reason is contingent, there is then a chain of contingents linked one to the other, and there is no being at all; for this being which is the subject of our hypothesis cannot enter into being so long as it is not preceded by an infinite succession of beings, which is absurd. Therefore contingent beings end in a Necessary Being.”

(Avicenna On Theology, trans. by Arthur J. Aiberry, p.25)



# Al-Ghazali (b. Eastern Persia; 1058-1111)

- His *Incoherence of the Philosophers* criticizes Avicenna's "synthesis" He exposes inner tensions within Islamic philosophical syntheses and opposes Neoplatonic views.
- Critical inquiry leads him to a crisis: He argues that "philosophy" is both incompatible with religion, and invalid on its own principles. Philosophy should be rejected, though logic, as a conceptual tool, should be retained.
- Philosophers (*Falasifa*) do not really prove the Creator, since they have reduced the world to a metaphor
- He rebuilds his faith through Sufic mystical praxis.
- Makes Sufi mysticism "respectable."



# Ibn Tufayl (b. near Granada, c. 1100-85)

- Spanish Arab works to rebuild Avicenna's synthesis through fable:
- Isolated child discovers the truths underlying the symbols of the *Qur'an*—truths that would reconcile the insights of Al-Ghazali with those of the Philosophers
- Criticizes al-Farabi for inconsistency regarding the afterlife; expounds Avicenna's "Oriental Wisdom"



# Ibn Rushd / Averroes (1126-98)

- Jurist, Physician, and Philosopher
- In the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, defends philosophy/the philosophers in the Islamic milieu against Al-Ghazali.
- Subtly distinguishes Greek philosophical words and concepts with Qur'anic language to defend logic and philosophy in terms of Islamic law (shari'a)
- *Falsafa* becomes theodicy, to prove and understand God
- Appropriates philosophy to the requirements of Islam
- Opposes Neoplatonic views

