

*ARE POSSIBLE FACTS REAL? An Avicennian vignette.*

Is *an act of will* one that might not have occurred –that is, one that merely had the *potential* to occur before occurring, and therefore was *possible* with regard to occurring or not occurring?

We can see how these questions bear on a number of issues, not least being the close connection between the two notions of possibility and potentiality. Aristotle's remarks on this subject became food for thought for philosophers after him. In contending that whatever exists in fact had the potentiality to do so Aristotle had in mind to distinguish between two totally different arguments, one to show it was impossible for matter to have come into existence from nothing, but must have required pre-existing matter in which to inhere –that matter, in other words, was eternal. The second –totally different- project was to explain change in nature: how something can produce change in something else, or itself be such as to undergo change from one state into another. Fire can burn wood, and wood can be turned into ash by being burnt. Both burning and the ash presuppose potentialities or natural dispositions –the

nature of fire to cause burning in wood, and the nature of wood to be turned into ash. He added, however, that it couldn't be the case that *everything* that exists had the potential to exist before actually existing, since that would mean that nothing at all would exist, *given that potentiality simply means the possibility of either coming to exist or not.*

Commentators, among them the one-time head of the Peripatetic school, Alexander of Aphrodisias, with whose writings Avicenna was familiar, and who was critical of Stoic determinism, took Aristotle to have meant that having the potential to exist precisely means that *something* is possible of existence before actually coming to exist, in the sense that it could come to exist or not. But this definition of 'possible' may lead us -by contrast- to having to define necessity separately, for example as what governs a special causal relation between a *something* that does not yet exist and something that comes to exist later; in addition to as what governs causal relations that hold or might hold in the natural world –e.g. between fire and burning. Besides this raising the question of whether such natural or hypothetical objects are of themselves geared to being parts of such relations, this limiting definition of necessity arguably

requires us to devise another way for referring to those other meanings for it that are also current –such as logical necessities- that are not covered by this definition. This, of course, can be done, but only by extending the relational approach governing natural objects to logical and conceptual ones. Either way, necessity here is introduced as a notion that is independent of possibility. In contrast with this approach Avicenna, who did not believe that natural or conceptual objects are of themselves geared to having relations with each other, also held that the modal notions of necessity and possibility cannot be defined separately from one another, but are definable in terms of each other, possible strictly implying necessary. What these two opposed approaches to the meaning of ‘possible’ are, and their implications on what an act of will means, will hopefully become clear as we proceed.

Alexander’s contention raises the question: what sense exactly is there to posit a potential *something*, whether object or event, that has not come into existence, and may not even do so? To clarify, this question not only concerns those so-called objects or events which are existents-in-awaiting, so-to-speak; it also concerns objects or events which are counterfactual- that is, objects or events which in fact exist, but which are then

posited in different circumstances than those that are actual. Isn't the contemplating of such an object or event ontologically meaningless? Or does it make perfect sense to posit such an object *in advance* of its coming into existence, as well as retrospectively *in lieu* of such a past event or object?

This question –of enduring philosophical interest- and the specific answer Avicenna gave for it, proved to be of critical significance for his philosophy as a whole. While it bears on the larger issue of the universe as a whole—whether this existed potentially before coming to exist in fact- it also bears on matters related to human agency. Let me rephrase the issue in terms that may be more down-to-earth and challenging to us: Is there sense in the sentence 'I could make you coffee' only once I actually make it- despite its grammar- and no intelligible ontic commitment implied by it before or if I don't make it? Or does it have ontic sense *in advance* of whether I make it or not? In the first view, that of Avicenna, only what actually exists –actually making the coffee- is considered possible. Before making it, my making of it is not possible, in spite of the subjunctive being used, and if considered irrespectively of its later being made by me, if it was so made. I will explain this last condition below. In the second view, my making of it implies it was possible

before my making of it. But this second view may be extended so as to include what *could* have come into existence, but did not- for example, as expressed in the sentence “I could have done such and such, but chose not to”. Ontic categories in this sense could thus cover both the potential which comes into existence and the potential which never does –those that could come to exist and those that could have but did not. Avicenna attributes this extended meaning of ‘possible’ to Alexander or some follower of his. To make the challenge clearer for us, the matter not only concerns the *act* of making the coffee, but more fundamentally the intelligibility of positing *myself* as the maker of it –the intelligibility, therefore, also of positing God as the maker of a world not yet made!

Aware of the different contexts in which Aristotle treats potentiality and possibility, and wishing not to confuse between them, where Avicenna introduces mention of the term ‘possible’ he does so in the context of other modal expressions. There he concedes a common meaning for it that may be misunderstood as implying an ontic commitment –in a sense, then, in favor of the second view: a commonly-held view of ‘possible’ –he tells us- is what is thought of as not being impossible. Avicenna leaves us to understand that this common

meaning for it may be mistakenly understood as an existential affirmation of what is talked about. However- we are to understand- considered scrupulously when used this way, examples such as 'I could make you coffee', or 'I could have read that book yesterday' should simply be understood as meaning that such contemplated but non-actual situations –taken as a package, so to speak- are not impossible ones, rather than as meaning that these exist or existed as possible or potential occurrences. The distinction is fine, but the idea is that one denies here the impossibility of some entire contemplated event–inclusive of its subject- rather than affirms its existence or the existence of its subject as one that is possible in a potential sense. It should be seen alike to interpreting the sentence 'unicorns do not exist' as saying it is not the case that unicorns exist, rather than as saying, incomprehensibly, there *exist things* such that these are unicorns and such that these do not exist. Here, similarly, it would make no sense to say *there exists* something such that *it does not exist* and such that *it is* not impossible. Thus, to contemplate a possibility in this non-impossibility sense –Avicenna gives us to understand- is simply to deny that it is, or was, impossible for me to make coffee rather than to assert the existence of my making of it as having, or having had, the potential of coming to be. This may be all what

people commonly have in mind when using subjunctives: not seriously affirming the existence of such objects or events –or even themselves- in some metaphysical world, but as denying the impossibility of their existence in this world. We could think of the distinction Avicenna makes here as one between denying that the prepositional clause “...that I make coffee’ is impossible on the one hand, and asserting about me in some possible world that I make the coffee. By saying that the common usage of possible is its negation of the impossible –and by interpreting this in the manner I have just done- I don’t believe that Avicenna was presenting an argument; he was simply suggesting this might be all what people commonly using the word are committing themselves to –or are warranted to commit themselves to- when they use it. A more formal meaning of the term, he tells us, one that in contrast is used by logicians or philosophers, makes ‘possible’ out to mean what is not necessary.

This leads us to consider the first view –Avicenna’s. By implication we are to understand this is not a common view, but a special meaning he wishes to give the word ‘possible’ in this context. But as we shall see we should perhaps understand it as a refinement of the so-called ‘formal’ meaning he tells us is given it by logicians. This is

that the making of the coffee, once made, is not something that comes about by itself. It is in *this* sense – that it is not self-made but required something other than itself to come to be made- that it is possible. Besides this telling us that whatever is possible in this sense is necessarily caused by some other thing –that possible strictly implies necessary- this meaning of the word also tells us that something is possible if it is already there, in actuality. From our vantage point, we can only tell it is possible once we see it to have occurred. But not seeing it as having occurred is not reason to deny that if it is possible then it must exist, somewhere. Before seeing it, strictly speaking, we cannot tell what is possible –what will be caused to be made, or what lies in the future. Later, as I shall point out, he uses this indeterminacy in our own minds to define what he thinks the word *truly* means. For now, sticking with his interpretation of the *formal* definition of the word, his point is that it does not make sense to posit *something* as possible, alike to what we do when we refer to something actual in our world in preparation to saying something about it. Without actually existing as something at some time, it cannot even be assumed there is a subject in view about which anything can be said, including that an event is possible with respect to it. There is an important *proviso* to this (rather radical

viewpoint) which Avicenna has in mind, and which I will briefly point out later. According to the second view, in contrast, my making of the coffee was possible before making it, whether I end up making it or not.

Clearly, besides bearing on the meaningfulness of whether and how potential objects, events or persons can be entertained as existing as possible entities, what we mean by possible also importantly bears on the related issues of capability (can) and of choice ('could', or 'could have'): On the second view –which many of us might feel more inclined to go along with- 'I could make you coffee' surely means I *can* if I *choose* to, meaning the possibility of its being made or not being made by me *exists*, or that both my making of it and my not making of it are undetermined but real outcomes, having equal ontic status, and my decision will determine which of these two outcomes it will be. 'I could have made you coffee' similarly posits the existence of the 'real' me as one who did not make the coffee after all. Thus to deny – with Avicenna- the meaningfulness of the possible as a potential (as what exists, or existed potentially) would seem *at first sight* to deny our ability both to do something we can do, *and* to make (or to have made) one outcome occur as a result of our choice. Indeed, while some of us might concede that potential events in

general are of a dubious ontic character, it might still seem to be going too far to claim that even the subject-terms in the relevant sentences under review also somehow fail of reference, or have oblique reference, especially when, as in the examples mentioned where self-reference is used, the whole idea is to express what we as human agents are capable of doing in the world.

This –whether we can determine an outcome that is not predetermined, or how we come to determine it if it already is- is one major issue that clearly lies behind the dispute over what is possible. I will address this issue in due course. The second and more encompassing issue, however, has to do with what exists, or what one can count as existing: Avicenna adopts the meaning of possible as that which makes sense only insofar as actual objects exist, but not insofar as there are such things as potential objects. However, while this view rids the world of one kind of events and objects –those that might exist or have existed- it perforce re-fills it with all that has existed and will exist, regardless of whether we happen to know these. As said, our lack of knowledge of what will exist in the future does not change from the fact that whatever *will* exist must also be possible- indeed *is already* in this actual sense possible. This confounds our understanding of future statements. By denying that ‘I

could make you coffee' describes a possible event in the potential sense, we are compelled to distinguish between such a sentence when I do not eventually make the coffee, and when I do: it is only in the latter case – pegged to its actuality in the future- that such a sentence would be meaningful and have a determinate truth-value. In contrast, pegging it to *me* as it is in the first example, and as one might express this by saying there is a possible world in which *I* make the coffee, becomes meaningless and therefore devoid of a truth value altogether - unless, as already said, it is formulated as the negation of an impossibility. In other words, it is only when such a sentence describes an actual event in the future that the singular term in it can be considered *rigid* -retaining its reference to the subject to which it purports to refer. However, this rigidity holds from our perspective, Avicenna tells us, only if and when we happen to be able to *peg* that sentence to the conditions in the space-time continuum that satisfy its actualization, or truth –as someone who might know all events on earth and in the skies and their natures, for instance, would come to understand how everything in the future will occur! (*M* 440). Otherwise, from our vantage point, we cannot tell what value that sentence has, and as already said, the idiom 'I could make you coffee' is then better understood as negating a future impossibility, or a

counterfactual past one, rather than as affirming the possibility of an actual event. Indeed, in holding the view that future singular statements reflect an indeterminacy in our minds and are either meaningless if in the subjunctive mood or determinately true or false in the indicative mood, Avicenna was parting not only from Alexander but, more seriously, from Aristotle himself.

I mentioned a *proviso* with regard to the question of reference in the context of possibility before, and perhaps this is the best place to try briefly to explain it: while as I already said positing a particular in a possible world in the potential or counterfactual sense according to Avicenna is ontologically meaningless, he at one point gives us to understand that –in contrast- some terms have what might now be called ‘strongly rigid’ designations, such that assuming the referents of these to exist is at the same time and perforce to assume them as being their actual selves, thereby rendering those postulations as meaningful. The examples he gives of these are general terms (e.g., Human Being) and abstract nouns (e.g., Blackness). The point he seems to make here is that, however we may wish to contemplate different possible states for these, we cannot but posit them as themselves in any situation we might imagine. As already explained, the case was different when he dealt with

cases where I might posit myself as a potential maker of coffee, or, by extension as an extreme example, Hitler, say, as a humane leader. Likewise, he would claim that it would make no sense to posit *this black object* as a white or yellow one, as it perforce wouldn't be itself. But unlike these cases, he now tells us that once we posit such a thing as *blackness* we would surely be positing it as itself rather than as anything else, but then either there wouldn't be anything at all to say about it if it is just posited as its pure self, or whatever we say about it must be constrained by whatever mode we posit it to be in—such as being an idea in our minds, or a function of light reflection in matter. Either way, our referent would be the existent we posit, simply on account of the fact that the *it* in question is nothing *but* that posit.

The distinction Avicenna makes in this context reflects his more general view —stated simply— that individuals in our world lie at the bottom of the logical ladder, presupposed therefore by general concepts. These concepts are our means to individuate, but in individuating we necessarily zone in on very specific characteristics. Particularizing blackness (for instance, as *this black table*), or human being (say as *Hitler*, or even myself), perforce shrouds their respective instantiations in such specificities that trying to abstract them from

these and to replace them by others becomes tantamount to abstracting *them* from the picture altogether. We no longer would be talking about *them*, or about the actual things that exist. Understandably, one may be more inclined to accept Avicenna's point here when faced with examples such as positing Hitler as a humane leader, than when positing myself as the maker of coffee. But he would argue that the principle in the two examples is the same –that in neither case would it make sense to presume to be talking about a real individual who exists. That is why the possible-world idiom where this concerns particulars in our world of generation and corruption- where the configurations of objects constantly change- smelled of trouble for him. In this world, as in the supra-lunar world of eternally-configured objects where –as it was commonly thought- specifications do not change, only abstract nouns and general terms do not presuppose any specificities except those that we give them, and that therefore remain with them, thereby ensuring the fixed status of their referents. Unlike myself in the real world, nothing in the nature of blackness prevents it from being considered in different modes. Likewise, in the supra-lunar world, there is nothing in the nature of the sun that prevents it from being imagined as one of many, or as pursuing a different orbit. Be that as it may (and this, as you know,

is quite a big subject) his *proviso* significantly seems to leave him committed to one version or another of fatalism at the level of persons or individuals, or at the level of actions. This is the point I wish to highlight in the rest of today's talk, but some more background explanation may still be necessary.

As many of you will know or can already surmise Avicenna's choice from among others for the meaning of 'possible' -that whatever is possible exists- is motivated by his more general contention that whatever exists is possible in itself, save for that which is self-made, or whose cause for existence is itself- what Aristotle eventually described as the Prime Mover, what Avicenna called the 'necessary of itself', and what Leibniz would later describe as the self-sufficient principle in the universe. But one has to be careful here in order not to conflate between these. It is important to stress here that Avicenna's principle is introduced as a compound principle of *thought*, combining what he tells us are the primary conceptual elements of existence, necessity, unity and the relative pronoun. Why, we might ask ourselves, is the relative pronoun included among those primary concepts? While he doesn't explicitly tell us this, combining these primary concepts together as we might think of doing by using the relative pronoun we end up

with 'the necessary (or self-caused) of existence *that* is unique'. This now stands as *the* primary conceptual principle. We are to surmise this is a basic standard or measure against which all our thoughts about existence must be set, and without which all such thoughts cannot make sense. Indeed, the so-called 'possible of itself' – what we come across in the world as what required something other than itself to have come to exist- can only begin to be fully comprehended as a concept when set against and as seen in the light of the more basic concept of what exists necessarily, or of itself rather than of something else. In other words, 'possible' comes to be properly understood in light of its being what *is not* necessary –what he already told us was the special meaning given it by philosophers. But '*is not necessary*' in turn presupposes both *being* and *necessity* as more primary concepts. It therefore also presupposes that primary conceptual principle of the being that is necessary of itself.

Although there is some scholarly disagreement about the matter –and even about whether Avicenna purports to provide a proof whatsoever for the existence of God- I do not believe that Avicenna falls into the ontic trap here, or purports to use the above argument as proof for God's existence. His discourse is to do with cognition. But he

does give us to understand that, in like manner to our conceptual structure, but apart from our thoughts, it is reasonable to *believe* that the reality grid must also be set out such that, since all that is possible exists, each of itself being not necessary, and therefore of necessity caused by something other than itself, then all existential slots are already -so to speak- spoken for, or predetermined, occupying their place in a web of intricate and necessary causal chains that must rest ultimately on the necessary of itself, such that no empty places are left for a potential object or event. Nothing is suspended in mid-ontological air, awaiting to be determined. This grid extends into the future –if there is one- as it does into the present and past, which is why, as already said, all future singular statements in the indicative mood have determinate truth-values. The entire grid is possible with respect to itself, but necessary with respect to its principle, very much in the way its parts are to each other and ultimately to that principle. Avicenna's view jars with that of the free-willist Alexander, but also with that of Leibniz and others within Avicenna's own milieu who try to keep a wedge in their worldview for contingencies –where human beings, as well as God, *could* uninterruptedly make choices, and thereby interfere with events in the world.

Indeed, Avicenna's picture does not leave the Principle, or God, with any leeway for contingent action. It is true the world without Him would not have existed, and that its existence in this sense is therefore possible. But its existence as it has been, is, or will be, is necessary insofar as it is caused by, and proceeds from him. He cannot make changes in it, anymore than we can change having made coffee. This is what Leibniz –indeed, many people– would disagree with. Surely, God can interfere in the world anytime of his choosing, in any way he wants. Leibniz is only cited here, by the way, because of his having seen eye to eye with Avicenna on the contention that *this* happens to be the best of all possible worlds. This raises a question about contingencies that I will mention towards the end of this talk.

Besides God's potency, however, the picture Avicenna provides clearly bears on the meaningfulness of human agency. How, then, does Avicenna explain the meaningfulness of our own acts? First, is it reasonable to believe God can change his mind if we prayed for his mercy? But second, would it make sense to work hard to achieve an objective we set out for ourselves? Aristotle told us that prayers and future singulars have no determinate truth-values. Avicenna tells us that both of these kinds of acts are meaningful, and indeed, even

determinately true or false. But how? Simply, while the future is fixed, we in general have no way of knowing what that future holds –which, after all, is what the *real* meaning of possibility is: we therefore do not know that God’s mercy and our prayer are not causally linked in the foreordained order in the first place, or that the saving of a child from drowning is not causally linked with our decision to save her. But is that enough to give meaning to our agency? Does it not simply leave us with no incentive or will to move from our chairs?

Avicenna’s challenging account leaves much to be explained, but I think he would argue as follows: even if I have no way of knowing whether the child is doomed to drown, or be saved, it is reasonable for me to think that, seeing I am the one person around who is in a position to do something about it, and that what will happen must in any case be caused by an external agent, that what will happen to the child will in all likelihood be the result of my own action or lack of it, since (I know) neither eventuality (the saving or drowning) will be brought about by itself. It stands to reason, therefore, for me to think that my action or lack of it may well be the cause of whatever is foreordained to happen. I may be wrong, of course. And of course, I may also be aware that how I decide to act is foreordained by some external agent.

But, besides the reasoning involved, what stands out as a determining feature in this situation is what I *feel* I want or should do –which of the two eventualities I *wish* to see happening. This is an instinctual rather than a moral imperative. I am not unaware that even this –what I feel I want to do – is also preordained. Even so, my want carries the day. It is this *want* that makes me go ahead and do what I do.

In like fashion I am unsure whether I will pass or fail the test, but based on the kind of reasoning already explained, and all things considered, I come to believe the chances I will pass *if* that is a preordained outcome will be greater if I prepare for it than if I do not. Again, it is my wanting to pass that makes me go ahead and do the rationally requisite preparation in the hope that this will be the proximate cause for passing. Of course, it may be preordained I will fail anyway.

This account of action that partly has emotion or instinctual want and partly reason or rational calculations as its components thus seems to provide a sufficient explanation of what we mean by determining an outcome through our actions, and what it means for our actions to determine outcomes. It also satisfies one intended meaning of the idiom ‘I could do X’: that for *the*

outcome O to occur there is reasonable ground for me to believe my action A will be the cause of O –an outcome I want and that will prompt me to act. If O does not occur as a result of A then all that means is that this wasn't to be, while if it occurs then I will have been that external and proximate agent to have caused it to occur. And whichever occurs would then be the one that is possible, having been caused. But neither will be a potential object or event lurking, so to speak, in some mysterious ontic dimension before one of them occurs. Does "I can if I choose to" lose its meaning here? Not if we understand this to say that I believe *the* determined outcome (e.g., the making of the coffee) will be brought about by my choice, rather than to say *one outcome out of two potential ones that have not yet been determined* will be so brought about. This, notwithstanding the fact I may be wrong on both counts. Likewise, when the subjunctive is used in non-personalized contexts (e.g. a war could break out), all this means is that we do not yet know whether that is foreordained or not. As already explained, this does not foreclose the meaningfulness of human agency in the manner above-described, or the so-called *wants* and actions associated with these or consequent upon them.

In effect, the functional motivation here is wanting, or my will to act, which –hand in hand with my mental calculations- explains what an act of choice is. But if it was an act of choice then wouldn't it have been possible for me not to act that way if my will was different? Indeed, does not explaining an act of choice this way bring back in the dreaded existence of a potential object of choice? Because surely, it could be argued, "I want X", as derived from "I could do it" implies *there is* an X I want –e.g., the saving of the child- when X has not yet occurred. We therefore stand before two kinds of objections to Avicenna's thesis here –that two outcomes are possible depending on what my will is, and that there is an existential affirmation of something I want, whichever outcome I choose. Avicenna's response to these objections in the relevant passage in his *Metaphysics* where he deals with this issue in the context of potentiality is elliptical and brief, but may be explained as follows: first, he tells us to say it's an act of choice (I could do X) *is to say if I will it I act upon it, and if I don't then I don't*. This is different –Avicenna says- from taking it to mean 'either I will it, in which case I do it, or I do not will it, in which case I don't do it'. In this latter interpretation, one leaves the matter of willing open-ended (that I either will it or not), and it implies a predicative assertion of my will to do something specific

in both parts of a disjunction, thereby leaving us with the conclusion that I either do it or not. This interpretation of 'I could do X' would be what the proponents of equally possible but undetermined outcomes wish to prove – either X or not X. But that, Avicenna says, is not what "I could do X" says. It does not express an indeterminacy of wants – that I either want it or not. Asserting my ability to do X here simply asserts the ability to do X *if* I want it. This an assertion of a conditional, Avicenna tells us, and not an assertion of a predicate, that is, an assertion of willing one thing in one predicative part of a disjunction and then of willing another in the other part. Certainly, it should not be understood as asserting my will to do one specific thing in either part. To interpret it this way would be to treat the will to do X as a predicate being asserted in both the antecedent and consequent of the conditional, or of a disjunction, as one might assert a predicate of a subject in a predicative statement, which would be wrong. Treating it as a predicate being asserted of a subject certainly implies there is an X which we want, or where, that is, we assert the existence of that X. However, what we *assert* in conditionals is *the relation* between antecedent and consequent, not the existence of the predicate of a subject. The relevant X here, or my making of the coffee, is therefore simply one component of a hypothetical posit rather than an existential

affirmation. To think of it as a predicate in this context would be to misconstrue the different manners of assertions in statements.

In this way, Avicenna denies the equal ontic status of two undetermined outcomes that may be understood by an act of choice, and maintains the relationship he holds to exist between willing and acting on the one hand, and a determined outcome on the other.

I must add that Avicenna's analysis here had God in mind as much as our own acts.

Regardless of how we assess his argument Avicenna's overall point is clear: he proposes to replace a fully libertarian (or Alexandrian) position by one that might be regarded as compatibilist. While his fatalistic view simply disparages the classical notion of free choice or will, his account of reason (how we think) and emotion (what we feel) arguably reintroduces sufficient meaning into the acts we undertake to do in a predetermined world.

Perhaps one last point that may need to be added here in order to complete the picture for us is the ease with which Avicenna makes us feel one can move from 'thinking that...' to 'believing that...' –that is, coming to believe that I could save the child from drowning.

‘Believing’ as a disposition is a spectrum that can terminate at one of its extreme ends in *faith*. Reinforcing my *want, or will*, I may not just think, but also come to believe strongly in being able to save the child from drowning, or indeed, to prevent a war from breaking out, thereby strengthening my will to act upon that belief. Indeed, belief underlies Avicenna’s entire theory of knowledge, making it an epistemological rather than a verification theory. At its extreme end, Avicenna invokes faith –this time, more clearly, in God’s Providence- as the underpinning of *all* our claims to knowledge, whether about the future, present, or past -indeed, about the correspondence between our world of thought and the reality grid. Paradoxically, perhaps, rather than being a disincentive, this thesis leaves the door open for a constant evaluation of our knowledge-claims, and incentivizes us to do what we feel we want, or- in this case- should or ought to do, as I shall point out in a minute.

But what if our foreordained wants are all bad, or evil? Does it make sense then to be punishable for these? Two elements define Avicenna’s theodicy: the distinction between the parts and the whole, and the negative definition of the bad as the absence of good. With respect to the parts –such as my want to hurt someone,

or such as a volcanic eruption- the resultant action or event can be described negatively as parts not having any good in them. It is with respect to the whole that the good permeates. The presumption here –however tenable or untenable we might feel this to be- is that the good of the whole is not constituted by the numerical sum of the good(s) of its parts; rather, it is a balancing resolution of the positive and negative characteristics of those parts. Of course, this puts into question the conventional matter of resurrection and of reward and punishment. Avicenna was justifiably criticized by critics who saw the implication of his views in this matter.

Maybe a final interesting comparison to make is that while Avicenna and Leibniz shared the view that this is the best of all possible worlds, Leibniz –as said- wished to maintain a room for contingencies –that God could make changes, that our supplications may influence his decisions, and that we could freely choose what to do. Hence, reward and punishment in the afterlife were an important part of his system. Avicenna, in contrast, couldn't envisage a best world that could be made better by any adjustments to it, whether those effected by God or those by us. How could a perfect maker fail to make a perfect world? In terms of final judgments –if we take those seriously- Leibniz's view makes more sense than

Avicenna's. How else can we be answerable in an after-life for what we do? More immediately, how can we be answerable in this world for what we do? I am not suggesting this latter question cannot be answered, but it is a challenge that has to be met by Avicenna, or by those holding his viewpoint –the emphasis needing to become, perhaps, on educating for 'the good wants' –on making our instinctual imperatives *moral* - and punishment being viewed only as part of this, rather than as desert. 'Moral education' may thus explain Avicenna's choice to include chapters about religion and prophecy towards the end of his *Metaphysics*. On the other hand, in terms of what 'best' implies –again, if we take *this* seriously- Avicenna's view seems to make more sense than Leibniz's. As said, how can a supposedly best layout of the world be made better by possible adjustments to it (whatever we take 'possible' to mean)?