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'Allamah Tabataba'i's Footnote to Mulla Sadra's Proof of the Sincere

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Abstract

'Allamah Tabataba'i (1904–1981) may be considered the father of contemporary Iranian Islamic philosophy. Among his most important contributions to Islamic philosophy are the footnotes he made while editing Mulla Sadra's *Asfar*. One of the most often cited of these notes pertains to a proof for the existence of God, called the *burhan al-siddiqin* (proof of the sincere). In this note, 'Allamah suggests a version of the proof that makes use of the term *waqi'iyah* (reality) in addition to the more customary *wujud* (existence). This paper begins with an examination of 'Allamah's footnote; and then considers how the basic idea could be defended against some hypothetical criticisms. For this purpose, Quine is introduced as a foil and virtual critic of 'Allamah.

Introduction

'Allamah Tabataba'i (1904–1981) may be considered the father of contemporary Iranian Islamic philosophy, for he began the public teaching of philosophy in the seminaries of Qom after the second world war, he wrote textbooks on Islamic philosophy that continue to be used today, and he trained some of the most influential professors of philosophy in the seminaries and universities of Iran.[1] As in the Western scholastic tradition, so too in Islamic philosophy glosses and commentaries often contain arguments as influential as independent essays and books. 'Allamah presented his own views on philosophical topics in books and essays, but also in his exegesis of the Qur'an and in his glosses and commentaries on other works.

In the tradition of Islamic philosophy as studied in Iran, the figure of Mulla Sadra (1571–2/16– 1640) continues to dominate. No discussion of any of the major issues of Islamic philosophy would be

complete without taking his position into account. Mulla Sadra also wrote glosses, commentaries, essays, and books. The most important of his books is known as the *Asfar* (journeys). Its complete title is *Al-hikmat al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-'arba'a* (Transcendent wisdom in four journeys), published in Arabic in nine volumes. Volume six of the *Asfar* begins with a discussion of God, proofs for His existence, and in particular, the "proof of the sincere", which is the name given to a proof that there is a *wajib al-wujud* (that whose existence is necessary) that originated with Ibn Sina.[2] According to this proof, it is through a consideration of existence itself that a proof can be formulated that there must be a *wajib al- wujud*, God. In Ibn Sina's version, it is argued, very roughly, that any existent must be necessary or contingent, and that if contingent, it is contingent because it depends on an existent that is necessary. Hence, there must be a necessary existent. In Mulla Sadra's version (again oversimplifying), we are invited to consider existence itself, not the existence of any particular object, but pure existence without any conditions. It is then argued that this pure existence is necessary, for it cannot depend for its existence on anything, and that whose existence is necessary is that which is not dependent for its existence on anything.

One of 'Allamah Tabataba'i's most influential ideas is presented in a footnote to this argument of Mulla Sadra.

The Footnote

'Allamah's footnote begins on page fourteen of the Beirut edition of the *Asfar* and continues onto the next page. In Mulla Sadra's text, after presenting his own version of the proof of the sincere, he cites a verse of the Qur'an: ***Say: this is my way; I invite to Allah by insight*** (***12:108***). It seems to me that Mulla Sadra cites this particular verse in order to emphasize that his "proof" depends on a kind of mystical insight into the nature of existence, but others would argue, to the contrary, that no insight is needed except that necessary to follow the steps of the proof. So, we begin with a controversy about whether the insight on which Mulla Sadra relies is mere logical acumen, or an intuitive witnessing of pure existence, which is to say, a sort of beatific vision.

Those who argue that his philosophy is free from the intrusion of mystical intuitions correctly point out that Mulla Sadra's method was indeed philosophical. It is an appeal to reason and does not make use of knowledge gained through intuitions or revelation as premises. On the other hand, he seeks to prove what he has found through illuminations. He employs philosophical argument for this purpose as far as it will take us. After that, there are only intimations.

Mulla Sadra follows the verse of the Qur'an with the comment:

And this account, that existence, as has been seen, is truth, concrete, unitary, simple–there is no difference among individuals in their essences except for perfection and imperfection, intensity and weakness.

'Allamah's footnote comes right after the phrase "truth, concrete" (*haqiqat 'ayniyah*). The word *haqiqat* means truth, but not in the sense of a truth value. It's opposite is not falsity but what is merely apparent, and is sometimes translated as "reality." It is also used in contrast to what is merely metaphorical. The word *'ayniyah* is notoriously difficult. It is often translated as "identity." It comes from *'ayn*, which, originally meant "eye", but is also used for "spring" (in the sense of water source), "self" or "the same," or "entity." It is the last two meanings that are relevant to *'ayniyah*, as are the cognates *mu'ayyin* (specific, determinate) and *ta'ayyun* (to be specified, determinate, realized as an entity). It is sometimes rendered as "concrete," in the sense of being fully determinate and objective. Thus, the footnoted part of Mulla Sadra's sentence states that existence is truth, not illusory, not just a metaphor, and existence is concrete, fully determinate, and objective.

In his footnote, 'Allamah introduces a new term that had not previously been used in formulations of the proofs for the existence of God: *waqi'iyyah* (reality).

And this is the reality that is not deniable by sophistry. We find that all who are conscious are forced to affirm it. It cannot be nullified, or its essence eliminated. Even if it is assumed to be null and eliminated, this implies its positive validation. Even if we suppose the nullity of all reality, at a time or absolutely, then all of reality would be really null (i.e., this would be positive reality). Such [*a supposition*] *is sophistry. Even if you see things as illusory or doubt their reality, in that case the illusory things are real and the doubted reality is real (i.e., it is established with regard to it being the object eliminated). When the principle of reality does not admit nothingness or nullification in its essence, then it is essentially necessary, so that it is essentially necessary reality; and things for which reality is impoverished, their reality has dependent existence on it* [*i.e., on essentially necessary reality*].

From this it is evident to those who contemplate, that the principle of the existence of the essentially necessary is required for man, and that positive proofs of it are admonitions to its truth.

Although the prose of the footnote is somewhat convoluted (even in Arabic), on several points 'Allamah's students and commentators are in agreement.[3] First, 'Allamah introduces the necessary in existence as being reality itself. God is reality. Putting it this way, however, is misleading. It lends itself to accusations of pantheism. In the view of 'Allamah, however, reality is not the same as the universe, or the collection of all facts, or anything else divisible, universal or particular. It is what is affirmed even as one tries to deny it. Second, reality is not a substance (it is neither a primary substance nor a secondary substance), and it is not spiritual substance or any other sort of substance.

There would be reality even if there were no substances of any kind and the universe were completely void. Third, 'Allamah's argument does not require one to accept the impossibility of an infinite series of causes, or any other principle of causality. Fourth, the argument does not depend on any of the major theses in Mulla Sadra's philosophy, such as the fundamentality of existence or the gradation of existence, although the note alludes to the latter when it mentions things with dependent or impoverished realities. Finally, like Mulla Sadra's argument, what the argument does require is insight. It

invites us to look at reality or existence in a certain way by which we are able to understand that in this sense, reality or existence is the necessary in existence–or God.

Entia Non Grata

There are several points in 'Allamah's footnote that seem clumsy or highly disputable (at least as I have translated it). The objections that might be raised may become clearer if we imagine how Willard Van Orman Quine might have reacted to 'Allamah's footnote.

First, Quine has warned against the idea that the use of a noun in a true sentence requires us to posit an entity in the domain of discourse to which the noun refers. The word "sake" is a noun, Quine points out, but there is nothing to which it refers.[4] Likewise, one might protest to 'Allamah that although "reality" is a noun, there is no reason to suppose that in addition to all the real things in the world there is an additional one that goes by the name "reality." We can admit the meaningful use of expressions that contain the word "reality" and say that things exist in reality, or that someone's views are far from reality, or that the reality of a situation requires some policy change, all without conceding that there is any such thing as reality itself. We will return to this issue later.

Second, there is the argument that if something is not real, if things are illusory, then the illusory things are real. This seems to be the sort of thing Quine ridicules as the tangled doctrine of *Plato's beard*.[5] Quine's example is Pegasus. He has a certain McX argue that Pegasus must be in order for one to meaningfully assert that Pegasus does not really exist. This is not 'Allamah's argument. McX gives an argument based on meaningful assertions in order to reach the conclusion that Pegasus has some sort of being. McX thinks that if a sentence like, "Pegasus does not exist" is meaningful, "Pegasus" must refer to something. The argument 'Allamah offers is entirely different, or at least it may be, and has been, so interpreted.[6] The second parenthetical remark in the footnote seems to be McX's point.

However, 'Allamah has no need to argue for the reality of Pegasus on any level at all. All he needs is an argument that when it is supposed that Pegasus is not real, we are forced to admit that something is real–not Pegasus, but the illusion of Pegasus, or the myth of Pegasus, or the supposition of Pegasus. McX makes the mistake of looking for a referent for "Pegasus". 'Allamah does not need this. All he needs is to show that when the existence of something is denied, some alternative reality is asserted, some reality without the object. Illusions will exist when what they seem to show does not exist. Fantasies are real, although what is dreamed in them is not. One truly dreams even when what is depicted in the dream is not true. There are good questions that can be raised about 'Allamah's proof, but to object that it is guilty of the sorts of mistakes that Quine's McX makes is a grave misunderstanding.

Third, we could also expect Quine to balk at the talk of essences. Even if it were granted, for the sake of argument, that reality itself exists, 'Allamah speaks about the essence (*dhat*) of reality as defying elimination. Quine may be considered a radical anti–essentialist, in the sense that he rejects all talk of essences absolutely. While he would grant that it may be useful to use the term "reality" if we are

cautions enough not to assume that the term is a name for anything, he would not grant as much to "essence." In response, a large number of writers have defended essentialism from Quine's attacks, most famously Kripke and Putnam. These defenses of essentialism, however, turn on the ability to identify some set of properties that explain why some things are identified as being instances of a natural kind.

It seems unlikely that philosophical theories that enable a defense of essentialism for such things as whales, tigers and gold would also be able to justify the idea of an essence of reality, because the natural kinds collect numerous instances about which empirical theories can be developed with respect to which essential properties can be identified; but reality is one of a kind. In response on behalf of 'Allamah one could argue that although modern defenses of essentialism were first formulated for *natural* kinds, the intuitions supporting such arguments are much more general. Robert Adams, for example, has defended a metaphysical theory of the essence of goodness that draws on the same sorts of considerations as those to which Kripke and Putnam drew attention in their arguments about natural kinds. What is crucial here is the ability to distinguish between semantic questions about the meanings of terms, epistemological questions about how we identify things as having certain properties, including being of certain kinds, and metaphysical questions about the nature of the entities in question, to be answered by providing an explanation with reference to the appropriate sort of theory, which will be drawn from physics, economics, metaphysics, or some other relevant science.[7]

Fourth, Quine would certainly dispute the introduction of "necessity". Quine has distinguished three grades of modal involvement of increasing repugnance.[8] The most repugnant is that of *de re* modalities, in which case it is not propositions that are held to be necessary or possible; but things, no matter how described, are held to have properties necessarily or possibly. The very idea of a *wajib al-wujud*, that which is necessary in its existence, would seem to involve some sort of *de re* necessity, which Quine rejects because he holds it commits us to essentialism. However, if some general form of essentialism is accepted, there will be no reason to shy from *de re* necessities. I think it is clear that 'Allamah would subscribe to a metaphysics of *de re* necessities.

Fifth, there is this idea that existence is the same as reality. Surely, for Quine the two should not be the same, (despite the occasional slip when Quine implies that what there is just is what is real).[9] Of course, Quine should consider the use of both nouns as elliptical, so that sentences in which they occur could be reparsed with "exists" or "is real" instead of "existence" and "reality". As Quine sees it, "exists" should be reserved for items we would admit as the values of the variables once all human knowledge is formulated into the language of first order quantification. The predicate "is real" however, ought to fare differently, because it is used to contrast illusion or deception from what is authentic. The counterfeit dollar exists just as much as the real one. The question of whether an imagined difference is real or not is likewise not a question of ontology.

Clearly, for 'Allamah Tabataba'i, existence as Quine understands it is not reality. It is neither a general

term nor a name for the domain of discourse for an ideally complete science. Existence, for 'Allamah, is to be contrasted with quiddity or whatness (*mahiya*). To appreciate what existence is, we should consider it as free from any limitation imposed by the features that entities may or may not be represented as having.

As for the difference between counterfeit and genuine dollars, since 'Allamah is does not restrict his notion of existence to entities for which there is a clear principle of identity, as Quine does, and he does not limit what exists to what would be accepted as the value of a bound variable, he would be happy to grant "things" such as differences existence, if they are real.

Quine and 'Allamah on Reality

Surprisingly, Quine does not express reservations about taking reality itself to be an existing thing. In fact, in a number of places Quine uses the term "reality," much as 'Allamah does, as if it referred to something. He even refers to "reality" when warning that not all substantives in true sentences should be assumed to be referential:

Some uncritical persons arrive thus at a copy theory of language: they look upon the elements of language as names of elements of reality, and true discourse as a map of reality. [10]

In accordance with his definition of naturalism, Quine's "reality" would refer to nature, however, while 'Allamah's "reality" is only manifested in nature.

The answer is naturalism: the recognition that it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described. [11]

What reality is like is the business of scientists, in the broadest sense, painstakingly to surmise; and what there is, what is real, is part of that question. [12]

The quest of a simplest, clearest overall pattern of canonical notation is not to be distinguished from a quest of ultimate categories, a limning of the most general traits of reality. nor let it be retorted that such constructions are conventional affairs not dictated by reality; for may not the same be said of a physical theory? True, such is the nature of reality that one physical theory will get us around better than another' but similarly for canonical notations. [13]

I suggest that it is a mistake to seek an immediately evident reality, somehow more immediately evident than the realm of external objects. [14]

'Allamah would disagree both with Quine's naturalism and with his suggestion that it is a mistake to seek a more immediately evident reality than the physical world. His argument is implicit in the footnote. There reality is presented as that which cannot be denied without sophistry, that is, that the denial of which results in a contradiction. Reality as Quine understands it, i.e., nature, is contingent. It might have never

existed. There is no contradiction involved in the claim that nature does not exist, especially if nature is specified as that which is susceptible to investigation by the methods of the empirical sciences, or even to the business of scientists in the broadest possible sense. Reality could be so chaotic that the scientific investigation of reality would be pointless. Reality also could have been a void: no matter and no energy, no time and no space. This may stretch the imagination, but it is not a self-contradictory hypothesis. Since there would be a reality regardless of whether or not there was nature; nature is not reality.

The point may become clearer if we consider Quine's own argument for the existence of reality.

We cannot significantly question the reality of the external world, or deny that there is evidence of external objects in the testimony of our senses; for, to do so is simply to dissociate the terms 'reality' and 'evidence' from the very applications which originally did most to invest those terms with whatever intelligibility they may have for us. [15]

The idea that skeptical doubts are undermined by semantic difficulties has since become a major area of controversy,[16] especially due to arguments first proposed by Hilary Putnam.[17] The above quote from Quine was first made public at a conference in 1954. For our purposes, however, there is no need to adjudicate the arguments given on this issue, for it suffices to notice that in 'Allamah's argument, there is no need to propose the skeptical hypothesis. 'Allamah does not argue that it is possible that we are mistaken about reality, and that we are really brains in vats or dreaming sleepers; rather he need merely argue that it possible that the world as we know it, including ourselves, not to have existed at all. In such a *possible world*, if you like, there would still be reality, but there would be no nature. Hence, reality is not nature.

If reality is not nature, according to 'Allamah, what is it? The short answer is: God. The philosophical understanding of God in the tradition of Islamic philosophy is *wajib al-wujud*, that which is necessary with regard to its existence. Reality, however, is necessary in its existence, since no matter what were to exist or not to exist, whatever was the case would constitute reality. Here some caution is needed about the term "constitution". To say that reality is constituted, even if only in part, by the physical world, for example, seems to imply that reality has parts. 'Allamah would object. Here we need to distinguish pure reality, or reality itself, from reality as it contingently appears. Whatever about reality is contingent is not reality itself, because reality is what would be no matter what the case is.

Reality Realism

Crucial to 'Allamah's proof is the claim that reality itself is real, and this is also the point at which many can be expected to balk. Call the affirmation of this claim "reality realism". We may divide strong reality realism (SRR) from weak reality realism (WRR) as follows. According to SSR there is some entity x to which "reality" refers. According to WRR, the claim that reality is real is taken to be true just in case something is real. Although enough quotations from Quine can be found to make it seem as though he would accept SRR, it may be that his references to reality, nature, and the external world are not meant

to carry existential import.

When Quine suggests "that it is a mistake to seek an immediately evident reality, somehow more immediately evident than the realm of external objects," he might be interpreted as meaning that in addition to the external objects that exist there also exists another thing called their "realm"; but it would be more plausible to interpret the phrase "the realm of" as a slip. If he had omitted the phrase in the above sentence it might come closer to what he wanted to say.

'Allamah argues that to deny reality is self-refuting sophistry. If we try to imagine a world in which there is no reality, the fact that there is nothing that might count as reality would itself be counted as reality. This point, as mentioned above, is independent of whether or not things are as they seem to be and other skeptical possibilities. A skeptic may propose that there only seems to be reality, while in fact there is no reality. But this is merely an instance of what 'Allamah considers self-refuting sophistry. Not only is it impossible for there to be no reality at all, even if we are radically mistaken about how things are; it is also impossible for there to have never been any reality at all.

How can 'Allamah's argument be challenged? One would have to argue that it is not self- refuting to suppose that there could have been no reality at all. As a first step, one could protest that there does not seem to be any explicit contradiction involved in the proposition that there is no reality, or that reality does not exist, or is not real. If, on behalf of 'Allamah, we try to formulate how a contradiction might be generated, we could propose the following:

1.0 Reality is described in part by every true proposition.
2.0 Whatever is described in part by a true proposition is real.
3.0 Suppose reality is not real.
4.0 Then, the proposition that there is no reality is true.
5.0 Hence, the proposition that there is no reality describes reality.
6.0 So, reality is described in part by a true proposition.
7.0 Reality is real.
8.0 Reality is real and reality is not real (by assumption 3).
9.0 Therefore, it is not the case that reality is not real.
10.0. Reality is real.

Instead of this indirect proof, a simpler direct proof could also be formulated:

1.1 Reality is described in part by every true proposition.
2.1 Whatever is described in part by a true proposition is real.
3.1 There are true propositions.
4.1 Reality is described in part by a true proposition.
5.1 Reality is real.

In either form, the first premise is especially debatable. One could be skeptical about propositions, but

then the same basic argument could be formulated in terms of beliefs, statements or sentences. So, I will stick with propositions here and say no more about what they are.

Secondly, one could deny that true propositions describe reality. One might hold, for example, that the proposition that two plus two equals four does not describe reality. It might be said to describe the relation of addition, or the numbers two and four, or mathematical conventions, but not reality.

Third, one might balk at "reality" and hold that there just is no such thing. There are real pencils and real differences, perhaps, but no reality. The objection to reality is that it is not a thing. One might deny that reality is a thing because the term "reality" is too vague, or because there are intractable problems with the best theories about what reality is, or because of ontological parsimony.

In order to attempt to salvage 'Allamah's argument from these last two sorts of criticism, one might retreat from SRR and take up some version of WRR. According to WRR, statements in which the term "reality" occurs are elliptical for statements in which "something real" occurs. With this in mind, we could rework the first premise of the arguments above as follows.

1.2 Something real is described in part by every true proposition.

The first problem with this is that it seems to mean that all true propositions partially describe a unique thing. This is far from uncontroversial. To fix this problem the quantifiers would need to be reversed.

1.3 For every true proposition there is something that it in part describes.

The second problem is what to do about truths that do not appear to describe anything. Consder: "There are no unicorns." That is a true sentence. It does not describe unicorns, however, for there are none. 'Allamah's footnote introduces "reality" where Mulla Sadra refers to truth, concrete. In Western philosophical parlance this would seem to indicate objective facts. The proposition that there are no unicorns describes the fact that there are no unicorns. However, to interpret talk about reality as talk about facts is still quite controversial. There are all sorts of disputes about what facts are, if they are at all. In order to shrink from these ontologically serious controversies, let's follow Alston's lead in seeking out a minimalist solution to the problem.[18]

1.4 For every true proposition, what the proposition says is the case is the case.

Alston is concerned to work up a rather minimally realist conception of truth that he calls "alethic realism." He wants to contrast this with various forms of anti-realism that typically make truth conditional on various epistemic considerations, such as, for example, what the community of investigators will agree on in the long run, as Peirce put it. Our aim here is different. We want to find a paraphrase of 'Allamah's *proof of the sincere* that can steer away from controversy and yet ultimately point us toward a *wajib al-wujud*. So, we will, unlike Alston, leave (1.4) open to interpretation as to whether the truth of a proposition has any additional epistemic or other conditions. In that way, our account will be compatible

with both realist and anti-realist accounts of truth. There is a realist element in our account, but only insofar as what a proposition says is true (or, more precisely, as Alston explains, what one who makes a statement with a given propositional content says is true, and what one who holds a belief with that propositional content believes in holding that belief is true) is the case. The account is minimally realist, because it does commit us to the view that what true propositions say is the case, but it is minimal because it allows any other conditions to be added.

One might still object that necessary truths do not satisfy even the conditions needed for this sort of a minimal realism. The fact that 2+2=5 is considered by some philosophers of mathematics as describing the formal structures we use for counting, not the world. They would be able to agree with a minimally realist interpretation of truth for contingent truths, but not for necessary ones. Others hold that necessary truths are descriptive of the world. Without trying to adjudicate these issues in the philosophy of mathematics and logic, we can avoid the issue by restricting ourselves to those propositions that are such that if true then what they say is the case is the case. Let's call these *minimally realist* or *MR propositions*.

1.5 For every true MR proposition, what the proposition says is the case is the case.
2.5 Whatever is the case is real.
3.5 There are true MR propositions.
4.5 What the true MR propositions say is the case is the case.
5.5 What the true MR propositions say is the case is real.

One might agree that the above argument is sound but observe that it doesn't lead us to a *wajib al-wujud* by any stretch of the imagination. We are only left with the near platitude that what true MR propositions say is the case is real. The reformulation is also misleading, because it suggests that what is meant by "reality" is just what the contingently true propositions say is the case. One might also have reservations about giving ontological status to what is the case or what propositions say. It is certainly reasonable to have serious doubts about the existence of such entities as facts and states of affairs, and these doubts could lead to a rejection of (2.5).

In order to avoid ontological commitment to facts, states of affairs, or propositional contents, while at the same time granting that something is real when something contingently is the case, we reformulate the argument as follows.

1.6 For every true MR proposition, what the proposition says is the case is the case.
2.6 If something, x, is the case, then something, y, is real.
3.6 There are true MR propositions.
4.6 What the true MR propositions say is the case is the case.
5.6 Something, x, is the case.
6.6 Something is real.

In this way we need not insist that facts, states of affairs, or propositions are existing entities, only that the truth of a MR proposition implies that something must be real.

One might still object to (2.6) on the grounds that something being the case should not commit us to the existence of an *entity*; and one might also have qualms about calling what there is when something is the case a *something*. In order to make (2.6) plausible we need to interpret (2.6) in the most innocuous way possible. If (6.6) is a statement of WRR, we can try to formulate a very weak reality realism (VWRR) by relaxing the notion of what it takes to be considered something.

This relaxation is warranted as a reading of 'Allamah's argument, since his aim was to argue for a reality realism that ensues because a denial of it would bring self-contradiction. The denial that something is real will result in self-contradiction only if "something" is interpreted very broadly. We should also recall that in the tradition of Islamic philosophy, God is not a substance,[19] and so we should not expect that *reality* should have to fulfill substance-like conditions for being considered an entity.

The idea of relaxing the conditions for considering something an entity was suggested by Quine himself, in 1958,[20] (and later discussed with suggestions about how to specify identity conditions).[21] His concern was that attributes and propositions failed to have an adequate standard of identity to be considered entities.

In any event the idea of accommodating half-entities without identity illustrates how the individuative, object-oriented conceptual scheme so natural to us could conceivably begin to evolve away.[22]

Even if it were incorrect to say that there were any entities at all, this would not imply that there was absolutely nothing, because the world could be populated by what Quine calls *half- entities*. The problem lies with the conditions that are given for allowing something to have the status of *entity*. If the values of the variables bound by a quantifier (e.g., $\exists x$ or $\forall x$) are taken to be entities in the full-blooded sense proposed by Quine as being appropriate for natural science (call them *strong entities*), we could introduce weaker quantifiers, $\exists^* x$, $\forall^* x$, which would bind variables ranging over things with more relaxed conditions for existence (*weak entities*).

Indeed, any number of various conditions for being an entity could be each associated with a particular form of quantifier: $\exists^* x$, $\forall^* x$, $\exists^{**} x$, $\forall^{**} x$, $\exists^{***} x$, $\forall^{***} x$, etc. The weakest quantifier would be one that bound variables whose values included the values of variables of all the other quantifiers, both strong and weak entities of varying degrees. Let's call these *very weak quantifiers*: $\surd\exists x$, $\surd\forall x$. This allows us to weaken 2.6 and reformulate the argument yet again.

1.7 For every true MR proposition, what the proposition says is the case is the case.
2.7 If something is the case, then $\surd\exists$ x (x is real).
3.7 There are true MR propositions.
4.7 What the true MR propositions say is the case is the case.
5.7 Something is the case.

6.7 √□x (x is real).

The very weak quantifiers were introduced in order to fend off objections to 2.6. The result, 2.7, is necessarily true. Even in a possible world in which there were no full-blooded entities, or no entities according to some other criterion that one might at all plausibly propose, the very truth of the proposition that there are no such entities would be a contingent truth, and since all contingently true propositions are true MR propositions, this would imply that there was something, at least in a very weak sense. Suppose there were nothing of any sort that could be considered real. In that case, the very case that there is nothing to be considered real could be taken as a value for very weak quantification. If quantification is weak enough, whatever is actually the case itself can be the value of a variable. This makes 2.7 necessary.

One could object to 3.7, but this would be a very radical step. To hold that 3.7 is not necessary one would have to claim that there is a possible world in which no contingent propositions or their negations were true, for every contingently true proposition will be an MR proposition. Although some logicians have argued that there are contingent propositions with truth value gaps, it is impossible for all contingent propositions to be non-true, for if no contingent proposition were true, this itself would be a contingently true proposition. Hence, necessarily, some contingent propositions are true, and so necessarily there are true MR propositions.

Since the premises of the argument are necessary and the argument is valid, the conclusion is necessary.

7.7 √□x (x is real)

This still seems far from anything like the sort of reality realism sought by 'Allamah. It says that necessarily something is real. This could be given as a weak interpretation of the necessitation of reality realism, WRR. In every possible world, there is some way that it contingently is that is the case, even if worlds without any atoms, monads, ordinary sized physical objects, or any other strong entities. However, if we are to accomplish anything close to what 'Allamah was after, what is needed is the necessary existence of *reality*, whether or not reality is itself regarded as a strong entity. To get there, what we need is not 7.7, but rather:

8.7 √□x (x is real)

To infer 8.7 from 7.7, Quine, again, might assist. Consider the Quinean notion of a physical object.[23] Quine expands the notion of body to arrive at a notion of physical objects as four-dimensional things that include the material content of any region of spacetime, regardless of disconnectedness. These are highly artificial things, but nonetheless objective. A Quinean physical object consisting of the material content of the four dimensional area of Polaris together with that of my parakeet would be a useless posit and bizarre, but no less objective, in the sense that it would have a description the details of which would be in no way conventional. As for the existence of such physical objects, Quine's position is well

known: the things that science finds that it needs to include in the domain of discourse when its theories are put into canonical notation are said to exist.

Quine's doctrine of existence need not concern us here, however, for we are not considering what should or should not be included in a ontology confined to the purposes of the natural sciences. Instead, what is of use to us in considering what reality is, as 'Allamah Tabataba'i seeks to direct our attention, is the idea that we can put together weak entities to generate other weak entities, in the way Quine allows physical objects to be artificially contrived. Quine, however, limits his constructions to areas of spacetime with material content in the actual world.

There has been some controversy over his four-dimensional view of physical objects, but that is of no concern here.[24] If one has scruples about four dimensional things, posits could be introduced that are three dimensional but which are specified as occupying specific areas at different times. Either way, the concept of very weak quantification is broad enough to allow for the existence of such things.

The analogies between time and modality have been made famous by the work of A. N. Prior and Kit Fine, among others.[25] Drawing on this, we may expand the notion of things through the artificial device of a function that specifies the descriptive (rather than material) content of a thing across possible worlds.[26] For example, the book on my desk would be a wet book on my desk if water were spilled on it. An artificial object could be posited that will be just like the book on my desk in the actual world but would be the desk if water had been spilled on the book. This is not to say that the book would become the desk if moistened, but that the artificial object will be extensionally equivalent to the book in the actual world, and to the desk in worlds in which the book is wet. These artificial objects will be weak entities. Most of them, like Quine's physical objects, are useless and would not be seriously considered as candidates for anyone's ontology.

Consider rain. The claim that rain is real could be interpreted in various ways. One could say that it just means that it is true that it rains sometimes. But one could also define *Quinean rain* as the material content of all the places and times where and when it rains. "Rain is real," would then mean that there are such places and times. There are two reservations about Quine's physical objects I want to register here: first, he limits his physical objects to material contents; and second, he identifies the object with the (often scattered) content.

Instead, I want to suggest that material content or descriptive content could be used to *indicate* what is being discussed. In this way we could take rain to be that which has the material content of all the times and places when and where it rains without identifying rain with the places (more precisely, space-time locations) or their contents. Quine suggests that "apple," for example, could be used as a mass noun for apple stuff, or as a singular term for all apple stuff together. It is only at a later stage of cognitive development that he thinks we acquire the ability to manage reference to individual apples. Instead of becoming more specific about predication and individuation, however, we could be deliberately vague on this. We could then introduce a *minimally realist rain* or *MR rain* as that to which we point by specifying

the descriptive content of what is the case where and when it rains. We can leave MR rain unspecified as to whether it is a universal or a particular and whether it has material content or not. We can know that rain is real without knowing whether "rain" should be taken as a mass noun or a count noun.

Analogous to the way in which Quine extends physical objects through time, one could extend objects through counterfactual situations. Just as we could generate artificial Quinean physical objects by allowing them to include "[a]ny arbitrary congeries of particle–stages, however spatiotemporally gerrymandered or disperse,"[27] so too, we could generate weak entities by arbitrarily putting together things spread across different places, times and possible worlds. Modalized Quinean rain exists as the same thing in every world in which Quinean rain exists. The step of modalization is needed in order to gather the various possibilities for rain within a single entity. Otherwise, one could hold that the Quinean rain of the actual world is limited to the actual world, and that the rain that might pour would not be the same rain. Modalized MR rain would be what is indicated by the descriptive content of what is the case in each possible world when and where it rains. All the cases of rain will be indicators of the same thing, MR rain, not because MR rain is taken to be a single thing that is spread out in portions across worlds and times and locations, and not because of a numerical identity between the rain at one place or world and the rain at another, but in the minimal sense that there are no conditions by which to distinguish one rain from another. It is just rain.

If there is a weak entitiy *e1* that exists in a possible world *w1* and a weak entitiy *e2* that exists in a possible world *w2*, then there is a weak entitiy *e3* that exists in a possible world *w1* and *w2* with the descriptive content of *e1* in *w1* and the descriptive content of *e2* in *w2.* This is a necessary consequence of the weakness of the notion of very weak quantification. Let's call this *the principle of the modal expansion of weak entities*. With this principle it is clear that 7.7 implies 8.7.

The only problem is that our *principle of the modal expansion of weak entities* provides for an explosion of such entities. There will be no problem now finding "necessary" existents, but there will be many of them, and they will be arbitrary, artificial and completely unintuitive. Consider a function that randomly assigns the descriptive content of some weak entity for each possible world to produce a new weak entity. Such an entity will be necessary only because it has an assignment for each possible world, not because it resists denial, or has to be, no matter what, as in 'Allamah's thinking.

In order to get from 8.7 to a conclusion more in keeping with 'Allamah's footnote, from which we have admittedly strayed rather widely, we need to narrow down the weak entities, discarding the arbitrary ones and keeping those that are more natural or intuitive. Then, we need to demonstrate that the only necessarily existing intuitive weak entity is reality itself. Let reality itself be that whose descriptive content in any given world is all that is the case at that world. This is not to *identify* reality with such content, or a function from worlds to contents, only to indicate it. MR reality will be analogous to MR rain, as described above. What is wrong with most of the arbitrary weak entities is that they are too determinate; they are artifacts of our own devising, fantasy instead of reality.

What then of MR reality? The theological skeptic will charge that this too is a mere artifact. To this we should protest that reality is as real as rain, if not more so. What can be indicated by any possible descriptive content is itself without descriptive content. But it is only by such content that a distinction could be drawn in terms of which the reality in some possible world could be held to be different from actual reality.

Our exegesis of 'Allamah's proof leaves plenty of room for the skeptic to resist the conclusion. One could deny that any weak entities are real; one could deny that minimal realism is correct about any set of truths; finally, one could deny the transworld identity of reality. Are we to conclude that the proof is a failure? I think not. All of the disputable claims that the atheist can resist are claims that it is at least plausible to affirm. So, it is plausible to hold that there is something, namely reality, that is necessarily real. This reality is not an entity on a par with planets, atoms, chickens and trees, but the philosophy that draws our attention to it does not intend it to be understood as such.

Reality is what there is no matter what else there is. Any attempt at a positive proof for it is really just an admonition, a direction of the attention to what transcends any limitation of human conceptualization, mastery of the mechanisms of reference, quantification or positing.

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1. See Algar (2006).
2. See Legenhausen (2004).
3. See Ayatollahy (2005), 111–112.

4. Willard Van Orman Quine (1960), 244f.
5. Quine (1963), 1–19.
6. See Amuli.
7. See Adams (1999), 15–28.
8. Quine (1976a), 158–176.
9. Quine (1960), 22.
10. Quine (1976c), 232.
11. Quine (1981), 21.
12. Quine (1960), 22.
13. Quine (1960), 161.
14. Quine (1976b), 225.
15. Quine (1976c), 229.
16. See, for example, Brueckner (2004).
17. Putnam (1981).
18. Alston (1996), 18.
19. See Legenhausen (2007).
20. Quine (1969), 1–25.
21. Quine (1981b).
22. Quine (1969), 24.
23. See Quine (1981a); Quine (1974), 52–54; Quine (1976d), 259–264.
24. For more on this see McCall (1996), 214 –217, and McCall and Lowe (2006).
25. Prior and Fine (1977).
26. The descriptive content of an object can be understood roughly as the set of all the non –modal properties of the object.
27. Quine (1974), 54.

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