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Avicenna on Place: A Phenomenological Approach[1]

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Abstract

This essay will address the following question: how did Avicenna, the follower and commentator of Aristotle, manage to achieve a more comprehensive account of "place" (*makān*) than Aristotle himself did before *differently* in *Categories* and *Physics*. This theory of "place" is also phenomenological, since Avicenna's related works deal with the concrete phenomena of the physical world, thereby describing *how* place shows itself to us, illustrating the ways we understand through its relation to bodies. Rather than delivering the *essence* of place, Avicenna delineates the priority of place by expressing that every body that is in the physical world must be emplaced. In other words, there would be no world (ʿālam) without local places particular to the things placed in that world. This ontological power of place not only guarantees every body its "proper place" (that is, every thing has its own place by its very nature) but also describes how places must be filled with bodies (i.e., "thinged"), without falling into the error of identifying one with the other. A phenomenological approach to Avicennan physics, in this essay, will disclose that the power of place designated by Aristotle is strengthened in terms of its uniqueness and irreducibility, before giving way to the supremacy of space (*spatium*) in modern philosophy.

Keywords: Aristotelian Physics, Avicennan Physics, Place, Space, Phenomenology.

İbn Sînâ'nın Mekân Görüşü: Fenomenolojik Bir Yaklaşım

Öz

Bu makale şu soruyu ele alacaktır: Aristoteles'in takipçisi ve şârihi olan İbn Sînâ, bizzat Aristoteles'in *Kategoriler* ve *Fizik* eserlerinde *farklı şekillerde* öne sürdüğünden daha kapsamlı bir "mekân/yer" kuramına ulaşmayı nasıl başarmıştır? Bu "mekân" teorisi aynı zamanda fenomenolojiktir, zira İbn Sînâ'nın konuyla ilgili eserleri fiziksel dünyanın somut fenomenleriyle ilgilenir, böylelikle de hem mekânın bize kendisini *nasıl* gösterdiğini açıklar hem de mekânın cisimlerle ilişkisi üzerinden anlama yollarımızı gösterir. İbn Sînâ mekânın özünü vermekten ziyade, fiziksel dünyada bulunan her cismin bir mekâna yerleştirilmiş olması gerektiğini ifade ederek mekânın önceliğini betimlemiş olur. Başka bir deyişle, bu dünyaya yerleştirilen şeylere özgü yerel mekânlar olmaksızın âlem (kâinat) de olmaz. Mekânın bu ontolojik gücü sadece her cisme "kendi yerini" garanti etmekle kalmaz (yani her şey doğası gereği kendine uygun bir yere sahiptir), aynı zamanda birini diğeriyle özdeşleştirme hatasına düşmeden mekânların cisimlerle nasıl doldurulması (yani "şeylenmesi") gerektiğini de açıklar. İbn Sînâ fiziğine fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım getiren bu makale, Aristoteles tarafından tasvir edilen mekânın gücünün, modern felsefede yerini uzayın (*spatium*) üstünlüğüne bırakmadan önce, eşsizliği ve indirgenemezliği açısından daha da güçlendirildiğini ortaya koyacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aristoteles Fiziği, İbn Sînâ Fiziği, Mekân, Uzay, Fenomenoloji.

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Introduction

In *Dānešnāme-ye ʿAlāʾī*, the "Persian" summary of his philosophy, Avicenna ends the section where he discusses the notion of place and the void with an interesting statement on Aristotle's view concerning the question at hand: Avicenna defends Aristotle holding that place is the containing body's interior boundary that immediately surrounds the exteriority of the contained, and then continues by saying that Aristotle *comes to be* in accordance with this view.[3] What seems to be strange here is not the fact that Aristotle's concept of *topos* is reaffirmed by one of his greatest commentators; rather, Avicenna's emphasis on Aristotle's stronger position needs to be highlighted. Some argue that there is a lack of harmony in Aristotle's theory of place, a discord between his notions of place *as interval* and place *as surface*: There are indeed notable supporters of this opinion,[4] that is, of Aristotle offering two different accounts of place, one in *Categories* under the section on "Quantity" and another in *Physics*, Book IV. In this regard, while we observe in Aristotle a "theoretical development" from *Categories* to *Physics*, we can also argue that Avicenna was aware of this change of doctrine on the subject. For he, Avicenna, rather than following Aristotle's *Categories* word-for-word in his own commentary, namely *Al-Maqūlāt*, holds out a more comprehensive account that undermines any chance of disharmony in his philosophy considered at large.[5] He does not just repeat Aristotle's definition given in *Categories*, that is, "the common boundary at which its parts join together" (5a6-14); instead, Avicenna here provides another one (a definition also employed in his many other works, including *al-Samāʿ al-Tabīʿī*, the commentary on *Physics*): "the interior surface of the surrounding body" (III.4). Thus, although Avicenna's *Maqūlāt* and *al-Samāʿ al-Tabīʿī* attempt at a different approach on place because of their idiosyncratic course of study, it would be hard to maintain that these two accounts are incompatible in terms of their theoretical basis. This paper will pay close attention, from the very perspective of phenomenology, to how Avicenna managed to achieve a full-fledged theory of place.

The first inquiry, in this regard, focuses on whether Avicenna addresses the weaknesses in Aristotle's theory/theories of place. These weaknesses include the concept of "surface" being two-dimensional, the lack of explanation regarding the relationship between local places and the physical world, the meaning of containment, and so on. Avicenna, not only in the particular volumes of *al-Shifāʾ* but also in separate works such as *al-Najāt* and *Dānish Nāma*, proffers a "complete" theory of place that fills the deficiencies in the Aristotelian schema. Second, while Avicenna follows Aristotle in principle, he does not show a strict commitment. He provides a more detailed criticism of those who consider place as interval. Additionally, he recognizes that Aristotle's "vessel" example is insufficient for a rigorous explanation of place, suggesting alternative examples for a better interpretation of containment. Through these instances, Avicenna also addresses the crucial relationship between place and the world in general terms. This raises a question: To what extent does Avicenna manage to reach a clear account of place? Finally, does Avicenna ever abandon the Aristotelian theory of place entirely in favor of an original doctrine of space? Both philosophers reject the idea of place being determined

[3] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *Dānish Nāma-i ʿalāʾī* [*Dânişnâme-i Alâî: Alâî Hikmet Kitabı*, Turkish-Persian Bilingual Text], trans. Murat Demirkol. (Istanbul: Yazma Eserler, 2013), 92a-b, 376-79.

[4] Henry Mendell, "Topoi on Topos: The Development of Aristotle's Concept of Place," *Phronesis* 32, no. 2 (1987).; Keimpe Algra, *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought* (Leiden & New York & Köln: Brill, 1995), Chapter 4.; "Conceptions of *Topos* in Aristotle".; Richard Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel* (London: Duckworth, 1988), Chapter 11.; "The Immobility of Space: Theophrastus on Aristotle."

[5] Andreas Lammer, *The Elements of Avicenna's Physics: Greek Sources and Arabic Innovations* (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), Chapter 5.; "Putting Surface Back into Place," esp. 311-67.

as a measurement of extension during body replacement or locomotion. However, how effectively does Avicenna safeguard his concept of place against the (re)emergence of the concept of space? To put it differently, although Aristotle does not adopt Plato's *chōra*, Avicenna's theory of place is set on the grounds of this notion of empty space (i.e., room). What remains in the event of the body's movement from one place to another is still described in Avicenna's works by the term *hayyiz* (viz. space). While indicating neither absolute interval nor infinite space but coextensiveness of place and the emplaced, is Avicenna able to do justice to the fate of *makān* (viz. place)? Does this approach, which includes a more nuanced critique of the void than Aristotle's, ultimately lead to a theory of space?

All these questions considered will give us the ultimate purpose of this essay: rather than a "fully" historical or comparative reading, it is a phenomenological investigation on Avicenna's description of place. His works delve into the concrete phenomena of the physical world, thus revealing "how" place shows itself to us, illustrating the ways we understand through its relation to bodies. Rather than delivering the "essence" of place, Avicenna delineates its "priority" by expressing that every body that is in the physical world must be emplaced. In other words, without local places particular to the things placed within it, there would be no world (ʿālam). This ontological power of place not only guarantees every body its "proper place" (that is, every thing has its own place by its very nature) but also describes how places must be filled with bodies (i.e., "thinged"), avoiding the error of conflating the two (as Descartes would venture into this centuries later).[6] After all, a phenomenological approach to Avicennan physics will disclose that the power of place designated by Aristotle is still preserved, or rather strengthened, in terms of its uniqueness and irreducibility, before giving way to the supremacy of space in modern philosophy.

1. The Definition of Place

In the Chapter Five of *The Physics*, Avicenna's analysis of place begins with a warning remark: "The first thing that we must investigate about place is its existence and whether or not there is such a thing as place at all; *nevertheless*, in the following *we shall not come to understand place itself, but only its relation to body* (in that [the body] rests in it and is moved away and toward it)."[7] The first part of this passage implies that he will probe into the supporters of the argument that place does not exist at all; and expectedly, he spares two full chapters (Chapters 5 and 6) on what they posit and a final chapter (Chapter 9) on how they fail in their reasoning. But the second part of the passage above maintains that the purpose here is not to acquire an essential understanding of what place is but to describe the relationship between the place and the thing that occupies it. Therefore, we come to a conclusion here, at the very beginning, that *The Physics* will not provide us a model that terminates the conflicts once and for all. On the contrary, what we will have is an account of the *correlation* of place and the implaced. This brings us to the notable definition of place: "the innermost motionless boundary of what contains."[8] This quoted definition belongs to Aristotle, not to Avicenna who eventually follows him in this direction: Place, in this regard, is the first, nearest (viz. immediate) and immobile inner limit (*peras*) of the surrounding body. Avicenna's account reads as the following in Chapter 9:

[6] René Descartes, "Principles of Philosophy" in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham. Volume I (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University, 1985), Part Two.; "The Principles of Material Things," §§ 10-11, 227-28.

[7] Avicenna, *The Physics of The Healing: Books I & II*, trans. Jon McGinnis. (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2009), 157; my italics.

[8] Aristotle, "Physics" in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 212a20-21, 278.

> Place is that in which the body alone exists, and no other body can exist together with it in it (since [place] is coextensive with [body]). It can be entered anew and departed, and a number of placed things can successively enter into one and the same [place]. These descriptions (whether all or some) exist only because of a certain material or form or interval or some contacting surface, however it might be. Now, not all of them exist in the material and form, whereas the [absolute] interval has no existence (whether as void or not). Also, the noncontaining surface will not be a place, and only that which is the limit of the enclosing body contains. [Given all this,] *place* is itself nothing but *the surface that is the extremity of the containing body*.[9]

We will go back to the further details of this long passage (such as the cases of interpenetration, interval, and two-dimensionality of the surface); but, our focus here, first of all, is on the definition of place as "surface". Avicenna provides a clearer explanation in *Al-Najāt* too: the inner surface of the surrounder is *tangent* to the outer surface of the body surrounded.[10] To illustrate, Avicenna (following Aristotle, of course) chooses the container for a model of his theory of place:[11] Like a container holding water, place surrounds what is within it. Notice here that this model offers an illustration for what place is, not an *exact* definition. Avicenna uses the analogy of a container: "To be in a place is very much like being in a vessel." However, "the question becomes just *how* this is so."[12] How exactly does this analogy apply? In other words, for the definition of place, we should not ask "what" place is, but "how" — *how place is?*

A thing's place is that which surrounds the thing, which is located *somewhere*. This relation delineates their togetherness (*háma*) in a given situation:[13] There is this body, which is mobile and subject to change; and the place of this body is where its immobile boundary begins. Thus, this body's place *somehow* clings to the body without being the body itself. They are closely attached: dimensionally coextensive as equals, yet not identified with each other. This ensures the body cannot be *in* another place. *At this given situation*, this place belongs only to this body, and vice versa.[14] But how are they so connected?

We can think of it as "contact"[15]: Place, as defined as the "first" and "immediate" surrounding of the body, is the contact between the body and what-is-not-the-body. Functioning as a bridge (similar to Plato's *chōra*, the receptacle of all forms), it both separates and connects inside (i.e., the body) and outside (i.e., not-that-body or any *other* body). Without this functioning bridge, i.e., the contact, a thing has *no place* in the physical world. Thus, since the fact that this immediate contact (namely, place) *mediates between* what is surrounded and what surrounds, we can propose place as a "double limit"[16] that cooperates between the outer boundary of the former and the inner boundary of the latter. Place, i.e., "the immediate surrounder", thereby defines the thing inside from *immediately* outside of it.

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[9] Avicenna, *The Physics of The Healing*, 201.

[10] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *Al-Najāt* [*en-Najât*, Turkish translation], trans. Kübra Şenel. (Istanbul: Kabalci, 2013), 113.

[11] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *Dānish Nāma-i 'alā'ī*, 92a-b, 376-79.

[12] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley & Los Angeles & London: University of California, 1997), 54.

[13] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 58.

[14] But in other situations, that place can hold other bodies; because it is not identified with the body that was previously occupied.

[15] Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion*, 188.

[16] Muhittin Macit, *İbn Sînâ'da Doğa Felsefesi ve Meşşai Gelenekteki Yeri [Natural Philosophy in Avicenna and Its Place in the Peripatetic Tradition]* (Istanbul: Litera, 2013), 277.

2. Two Different Accounts of Place?

We have just summarized Avicenna's Aristotelian account of "place", but before delving into its main problems, another significant question needs to be addressed: While we read in the *Physics* (of *al-Shifā'*) a "firmer" analysis of place, how does Avicenna treat it in his commentary on the *Categories*, namely *Al-Maqūlāt*? This question arises because a careful reader, like Avicenna himself, would likely have noticed a discrepancy between Aristotle's treatment of place in the *Categories* and the *Physics*. One might argue that their subjects and courses of study are already different: the *Categories* offers a logical analysis of place under "quantity", while the *Physics* examines physical space. However, *Al-Maqūlāt* interestingly includes two sections on place: one in "quantity" (Books III-IV) using the term *makān* (which translates *topos*) and another in "quality" (Book VI.5) using the term *ayna* (which translates *pou*). Rather than simply providing a "faithful" commentary on the *Categories*, Avicenna, as a brilliant reader of Aristotle, uses this discrepancy as an opportunity to offer a more comprehensive interpretation. Let us now delve into the potential differences between Aristotle's two accounts and Avicenna's proposed solution.

In the *Categories*, "place" is regarded as a "continuous quantity," unlike discrete ones such as number and speech. Being continuous, for place (as for other quantities like lines, surfaces, bodies, and time), means having a common boundary at which its parts join together. This common boundary is the point for the line, the line for the plane, the plane for the body, and past, present, and future for time: In other words, two lines join to create a continuity to be a plane. Finally, the common boundary for place is *where* the parts of bodies that occupy space touch each other. This continuity between the parts makes this place the body's own.[17] This means, according to Aristotle's general theory, that any substantial thing intrinsically has its own place; therefore, a thing's place is a metaphysical category that makes this thing "this."[18]

What makes it so different here is that place is considered a measurable magnitude whose parts also occupy the parts of the place. In this sense, place becomes a *three-dimensional* volume or extension simply because the body is a three-dimensional thing. This view is quite similar to what Aristotle will harshly criticize in the *Physics*: the collocation of place *as interval* (*diástēma*) between the outer limits of the thing itself. The *Physics* criticizes this view as it fails to explain physical change, motion, or locomotion.

In contrast, Aristotle's *Categories* present a different picture. Here, the place of the thing is coextensive with the thing to such an extent that place *identifies* the placed thing. Or at least, we can argue that the occupied place belongs to the occupant itself. However, remember that place as the container (in the *Physics*) had a distinct role, mediating between the thing and what-is-not-that-thing. Place is paradoxically both *with* the thing and *apart from* the thing — paradoxical but functional for explaining physical change and motion (since place is not identical with the thing). In this regard, place functioned as a semi-separate extension that is co-extensive with the extent of the thing. As we see, this interpretation of coextensiveness is slightly different from what is provided in the *Categories*.[19] Here, coextensiveness means place is identified with the thing that occupies it, and yet they are separable only categorically.

[17] Aristotle, "Categories" in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 5a1-14, 14-15.
[18] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 50.
[19] Mendell, "Topoi on Topos: The Development of Aristotle's Concept of Place," 211-12.

These theories diverge significantly. Keimpe Algra argues that Aristotle's thought shows a radical improvement: Since the *Categories* was written with Plato's *Timaeus* in mind, Aristotle here primarily focuses on the theory of substance. "The [*Categories*] account of *topos*," Algra suggests, "should not be read as a consciously and consistently held physical theory."[20] This work, he argues, "was not written from a physical perspective and should be read accordingly."[21] It focuses on the "categorial sense" of place, exploring its measurable three-dimensionality. In contrast, the *Physics* presents a more advanced and elaborated theory concerning place — a locational, physical concept.[22] In this later work, Aristotle *either* addresses the obvious flaws of his earlier theory and tries to resolve complexities (e.g., ambiguous use of terms such as *topos* and *pou*, the problem of physical change) *or* completely abandons some ideas (such as parts occupying their own place).[23]

In his remarkable essay "Topoi on Topos: The Development of Aristotle's Concept of Place," Henry Mendell also supports the idea of a discrepancy between the two accounts. He highlights the key contrast:[24] place in the *Categories* is understood as "primary substance," whereas place in the *Physics* is described as "material extension."[25] Mendell believes these accounts are incompatible, suggesting a change or revision in Aristotle's theory. This revision leads to a place that is less substantial but more material, allowing a more *relatedness* to the physical thing (since place and the thing were *thought* separately in the *Categories*).[26] Finally, Mendell argues that Aristotle needed to re-examine his theory to explain how things change: for the *Categories* account of place was inconvenient to explain the physical change and locomotion. As Mendell points out,

> Consider what happens when a substance exchanges place with another substance. We may look at the situation in two ways. Either the place is changing its occupants, or one substance is giving a property to another. In either case, the place persists through change of its subject.[27]

This hypothetical problem arises only because a thing's place is considered a separate category, though it is substantially inseparable (i.e., dependent on a particular substance). Conversely, in the *Physics*, a thing and its place seem to be separate extensions, despite being substantially inseparable in the sense that one requires the other: *to be is to be in place*, echoing the Archytean expression.[28]

Having analyzed the claim of two incompatible place theories in Aristotle, we now turn to Avicenna: Did he see a problem here, or was there no "situation" for him to address? This requires a close examination of *al-Maqūlāt*, as we believe it would be the key text to understand his approach to place: for if Avicenna saw an incongruity between the *Categories* account and the *Physics* account, *al-Maqūlāt* will be the explicit text to look at how the problem of place is handled. What is more, the complication that has kept philosophers engaged arises not from the *Physics* account of place (i.e., the container theory) but from the *Categories* version, which

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[20] Algra, *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought*, 122. Algra's claim is that here Aristotle is under the influence of the "bastard concept" of *chōra*.

[21] Algra, *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought*, 182.

[22] Algra, *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought*, 182.

[23] Algra, *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought*, 127-136.

[24] Another support comes from Richard Sorabji who thinks Aristotle has at least four different views on place: as "quantity" in the *Categories*, as "natural place" in *On the Heavens*, as "the biological function of orientation" in the *Biology*, and finally as "a thing's surroundings" in the *Physics*. See. Sorabji, *Matter, Space, and Motion*, 186.

[25] Mendell, "Topoi on Topos: The Development of Aristotle's Concept of Place," 226.

[26] Mendell, "Topoi on Topos: The Development of Aristotle's Concept of Place," 229.

[27] Mendell, "Topoi on Topos: The Development of Aristotle's Concept of Place," 226.

[28] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 4.

defines place as the interval between the thing's outer limits. Our straight answer to the question aforementioned: Unlike many other commentators and readers of Aristotle, Avicenna saw a clear disharmony between these two explications of place and made an effort to overcome this difficulty in *al-Maqūlāt*.

We have said *al-Maqūlāt* focuses on the subject of place in two different contexts: one is related to quantity (*kammiyya*), and the other has its own section, namely "On 'Where' and 'When'" (*fī al-ayna wa fī matā*). This two-pronged approach in *al-Maqūlāt* corresponds to Aristotle's uses of *topos* and *pou* in the *Categories*, but it also contributes to the present difficulty: Aristotle uses these terms ambiguously there. In Avicenna's commentary, however, things get easier to understand. Let us elaborate on that step by step.

The introductory section to "quantity" gives an explanation of the quiddity of being a body: its three-dimensionality.[29] This, for sure, repeats Aristotle's definition of continuous quantities. While a surface or plane is two-dimensional (because it comprises two lines having a common boundary at which they join together), a body includes depth and becomes volumetric. But we know that the *Physics* account succinctly defines "place" as "the interior surface of the surrounding body." *How can a two-dimensional surface determine the place of a three-dimensional body?*

In *al-Maqūlāt*, Avicenna adds another layer to clarify this issue: While a surface itself is two-dimensional, it allows us to infer the third dimension at the body's edges.[30] In other words, the concept of a surface inherently implies the existence of a three-dimensional body. Avicenna makes this argument because Aristotle's definition of place in the *Physics* —as the *inner boundary* of the surrounding body and/or the *container* of the surrounded— does not give us an explanation of "what" makes place "quantifiable." For Avicenna, place is clearly a measurable quantity because it is defined by surface.[31] However, crucially, this surface already implies the three-dimensionality of the body that is always in some location and subject to change. For surface is always a surface *of* a physical thing. In this way, Avicenna explains that place *as surface* is "dynamic" for the contained body (since it locates the body somewhere, gives the body its place, by coextending with the body) and "intellective" for itself (since it conditions its relation to other bodies).

This reciprocal characteristic of place relates the (locational) place as *makān* (*topos*) to the (positional) place as *ayna* (*pou*) is essentially the "being-in." The category "where" is explained by Avicenna at the beginning of a separate chapter: "The 'where' is defined by the *relation* of the [thing] implaced with the place in which it is."[32] In this regard, where things are "relative" and "genus" to species, which are, for instance, being "above", "below", "in" the air, or "on" the water. This, however, for Avicenna, defines the secondary meaning of place — we will call it here, *the relational place*. The primary, or authentic place, on the other hand, refers to the thing's unique, inherent place that belongs only to itself — we will call this in turn, *the ontological place*. In this essential sense, things or substances cannot occupy the same space simultaneously: that is to say that they can be in "one" place at the same time. However, in the non-essential sense, they can share "being-in" in the same place. For example, a cat and a fruit can both be "on" the same tree, or water and lime can be in the same

[29] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *al-Maqūlāt* [*Kategoriler: Mekûlât*, *Turkish-Arabic Bilingual Text]*, trans. Muhittin Macit. (Istanbul: Litera, 2010), 108, prg. 210.

[30] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *al-Maqūlāt*, 110, prg. 214.

[31] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *al-Maqūlāt*, 115, prg. 225.

[32] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *al-Maqūlāt*, 219, prg. 418.

glass — since the fact that the glass itself is not the "where," but rather the water's and the lime's "being-in" is.[33] But, despite being in the same container, the water and the lime each have their own proper places: Their own measurable extensions cannot penetrate into each other because every substance has its own unique place. In conclusion, Avicenna avoids defining place solely by its extension (as it also has a relational aspect) or solely by its position (as place extends what is contained). Instead, he describes "place" in terms of both its measurability and its relationality. These two distinct *aspects* result in the two different *meanings* of place, which deserve separate investigations (as Avicenna implemented) in two distinct chapters of *al-Maqūlāt*.

3. Phenomenology of Place: Describing How Place Shows Itself to Us

What makes this observation important is that commentators and readers of Aristotle before Avicenna either observed no conflict between the *Categories* and *Physics* accounts of place (e.g., al-Kindī) or simply ignored the discrepancy (e.g., Simplicius). Al-Fārābī, for instance, in his commentary on the *Categories*, namely *Kitāb al-Maqūlāt*, *does not fail* to observe the consequential difference between place as *makān* (*topos*) and place as *ayna*—he clearly distinguishes them in terms of the latter's characteristic of relativity—but *fails* to notice the significance of this difference.[34] Avicenna, on the other hand, pays heed to the way "place" can be understood from both the perspective of its relation to other things and the perspective of an individual thing's own extension in space. In the *Physics*, as in Aristotle's work, Avicenna describes the container model with everyday experiences: like water in a jar, or a vessel in the river. A thing's place was to be understood only through its relation to the thing itself that is related to other things: the vessel's place is related to the water streaming, which is related to the bed and banks of the river, and so on. This network of relations characterizes "place" as always filled with bodies—a common place (*topos koinos*) in which every other body participates: each thing shares being "in" another thing, being "above," being "between," and so on. Place in this sense is full of bodies that relate to each other.

In the ontological sense, however, every other thing that exists *exists* in its own extended being—defining a specified place (*topos idios*) that separates the thing from other things without being the thing itself. Here place as "something self-subsistent"[35] gives *room* (*hayyiz*) for that thing to be. Thus, in its dual meaning of interrelated being and quantitative determination, place is a unique and non-reducible phenomenon of the physical world:[36] It is unique because it coexists with the body with which it coextends, and it is non-reducible because it relates one body to other bodies.

It seems that Avicenna, a reader and commentator of Aristotle, brings the *Physics* account of *place as surface* to the domain of the *Categories* in order to elucidate the quantitative determination of extended bodies and their relationship with each other. In doing so, Avicenna reinstates the significance of place in controversial matters such as how surfaces change shape, the concept of coextensiveness, the tension between local and universal places, and the place of the cosmos. To articulate these briefly, Avicenna's full-fledged theory does not restrict "place" to its two-dimensionality because a surface necessarily requires the third dimension that makes the body itself. Also, place as surface is not only a place *for* a body but also a place *within* the world of

[33] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *al-Maqūlāt*, 220, prg. 419.

[34] Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Maqūlāt - Kitāb al-Hatābe* [*Kategoriler ve Retorik*, *Turkish-Arabic Bilingual Text]*, trans. Ali Tekin. (Istanbul: Klasik, 2019), 38-39, prg. 37-39.

[35] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *The Physics of The Healing*, 162.

[36] Casey, *The Fate of Place*, 70-71.

relations. Place, understood as the surface of the surrounding body, coextends with that body, which is subject to physical change and locomotion.[37] In this regard, place delimits the extremities of the body, i.e., *defines* its proper place (what is within) from the immediate outside. In this way, place is understood as that which always remains in locomotion, replacement, or any change of position.

And finally, to recall the problem of the world that is not in a place: if place was the inner boundary of the containing body, the cosmos would have to have something that surrounds itself; however, this is contradictory because the cosmos by definition cannot exclude anything to which it would be related (e.g., up and down, near or distant, etc.) On the relational ground, this is true: the cosmos, as a result, does not have a place for it. But on the ontological ground, the cosmos has its own place, a place that cannot allow another possible world to penetrate into. In this sense, the world dimensionally *coextends* with the bodies in the world without being identified with them: the world is a place for everything that is in it since the fact that the world would not exist unless particular places of things exist. Ergo, the world's place—or, the world as place—makes "room/space" (*hayyiz*) for things in/of the world to exist.

As Avicenna puts it in the final words of Book Two, Chapter Five of the *Physics*, "[place is] a certain preparatory [cause] to the extent that bodies come to exist in it. Also, when Hesiod desired to compose a poem in which he related the order of creation, he did not think that anything preceded the existence of place, and so said: 'Place is what God created first, then the broad expanse of Earth.'"[38] But if place, as defined in the beginning of this essay, is a contact—the contact between the body and what-is-not-the-body—what does the place of the world have the world contacted with? It is, for Avicenna, what-is-not-the-world, i.e., the Other; and this concerns the domain of metaphysics.

Conclusion

This essay has argued that Avicenna, through his critical engagement with Aristotle's theory of place, sought a more comprehensive understanding that resolved inconsistencies. He identified a key discrepancy between Aristotle's two different accounts found in the *Categories* (place as measurable extension) and the *Physics* (place as the surface of the surrounding body). Avicenna was aware that Aristotle's concept evolved, progressing from a static notion in the *Categories* to a more dynamic one in the *Physics*. He addressed the limitations of both by proposing place as a "double limit," mediating the relationship between a body and its surroundings. Avicenna's innovation lies in describing place as a relational and quantitative concept, existing in two different senses: *ontological place*, the unique and inherent place of a thing, and *relational place*, the relative position of a thing to its surroundings. Through this nuanced view, Avicenna contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical and philosophical development of "place" before the concept of "space" became ubiquitous.

[37] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *The Physics of The Healing*, 201.
[38] Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna], *The Physics of The Healing*, 162.

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