AVICENNA AND THE LIBER DE CAUSIS:
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DOSSIER

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RESUMEN

Partiendo del conocimiento que los árabes tuvieron de los textos neoplatónicos atribuidos a Aristóteles, tales como la Pseudo-Teología y el Liber de Causis, la autora de este estudio investiga el posible conocimiento que Avicena tuvo de este último libro, conocido en el mundo árabe por el título de Kalām fī maḥḍ al-bayr. Se apoya, para ello, en el análisis de cuatro pasajes de la Metafísica de la gran enciclopedia filosófica Al-Ṣifa' («La curación»).

Palabras clave: Avicena, neoplatonismo, Pseudo-Teología, Liber de Causis, Al-Ṣifa'.

ABSTRACT

Taking as a starting point the knowledge that the Arab world had of the Neoplatonic texts ascribed to Aristotle, such as the Pseudo-Theology and the Liber de Causis, the author of this study investigates the possible knowledge that Avicenna had of this under book, well-known in the Arab world under the title of Kalām fī maḥḍ al-bayr. In order to demonstrate this, she provides an analysis of four passages that belong to the Metaphysics of the great philosophical encyclopedia Al-Ṣifa' («The cure»).

Key words: Avicenna, Neoplatonism, pseudo-Theology, Liber de Causis, Al-Ṣifa'.

The Neoplatonic influence on Ibn Sīna’s philosophical thought has been acknowledged time and again in many important areas of his work. His metaphysical and psychological doctrines, as well as his ideas about the ascension towards the First Principle and final union with it (ittaḥād al-wujūd), have been explored from the viewpoint of their relationship with the Neoplatonic sources.1 The

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1. A.M. Goichon, La distinction de l’essence et de l’existence d’après Ibn Sīna (Avicenne), Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1937, gives room only seldom to the Neoplatonic sources of Ibn Sīna’s thought. The Neoplatonic influence has been acknowledged, albeit differently evaluated, by L. Gardet, La pensée religieuse d’Avicenne (Ibn Sīna), Paris, Vrin, 1951 (Études de Philosophie Médévale, 41), passim; A.M. Goichon, «La philosophie de l’être», in IBLA, 57 (1952), pp. 49-61; J. Janssens, Avicenna: tusen neoplatonisme en islam, Ph.D. Leuven 1984 (I am very grateful to Jules Janssens for having allowed me to read a section of his dissertation: see below, note 38); Id., «Ibn Sīna’s Ideas of ultimate realities: Neoplatonism and the Qur’an as problem-solving paradigms in the Avicennian system», in Ultimate Reality and Meaning,
attention of scholarship was obviously attracted mostly by the Notes Ibn Sinā on wrote the pseudo-Theory of Aristotle, the main remaining part of the Arabic version of seventeen Plotinian treatises. Translated into Arabic within the circle of al-Kindī and adapted to the religious and cultural needs of the newly born falsafa, the Plotinian writings became an important part of the philosophical curriculum of those among the Arab intellectuals who were interested in foreign sciences. Even though we still do not possess a critical edition of the pseudo-Theory of Aristotle and related Plotinian Arabic texts, a series of research by Paul Kraus,1 François Rosenthal,2 Gerhard Endress3 and Frédéric W. Zimmermann4 shed light on this text and reached the conclusion that it traces back to the so-called "Arabic Plotinus Source", namely, to a translation of selected treatises from Enneads IV-VI which was wider than the pseudo-Theory itself, and whose remaining parts share in the same stylistic and doctrinal features.5 The Prologue to the pseudo-Theory informs us that it was written in 10 (1987), pp. 252-271; A.L. Ivry, "An evaluation of the Neoplatonic elements in al-Fārābī’s and Ibn Sinā’s metaphysics", in Acts of the International Symposium in Ibn Sīnā, Khwarazmī, Frādī, Brāvī, and Ibn Sīnā, Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1990, pp. 163-174; P. Moreouède, "The Neoplatonic structure of some Islamic mystical doctrines", in Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought ed. by P. Moreouède, SUNY Press, Albany, 1992, pp. 51-73 (Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern, 5); M. Marmura, "Quiddity and universality in Avicenna", ibid., pp. 77-87; L. Westra, "Self-knowing in Plato, Plotinus and Avicenna", ibid., pp. 89-109. On the contrary, according to E. Both, Aristotlean aporetic ontology in Islamic and Christian thinkers, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1983, p. 109, "there is nothing Plotinian in Ibn Sinā’s al-Sīfī ontology". On Ibn Sinā’s psychology, see now the synthetic and really useful study by M. Sebi, Avicenne. L’âme humaine, Paris, P.U.F. 2000. M. Sebih takes into account the Plotinian inspiration of many aspects of the Avicennian doctrine of soul, its nature and operations.


The pseudo-Theory of Aristotle is presented by G. Endress as "an extensive commentary-paraphrase of texts from the Enneads (books IV-VI) of Plotinus, transmitted and received as Aristotle’s true ‘Theology’ (Uṣūl al-tahawva wa-hurra qaym ‘alā l-nabīhiyyin) as commented by Porphyry, and translated by ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Nī‘um from Hīrā (the ancient Emma). Other parts of the Arabic Plotinus source, homogenous in terminology, style and interpretation with the ‘Theology’, and stemming from the same ‘Plotinus source’ of the Arabic tradition, have been transmitted separately as dicta of the ‘Greek master’ (al-Sayy al-Yiiniin) and in an Epistle on Divine Knowledge (Risāla fī l-‘ilm al-dīn). The ‘Theology of Aristotle’ and its corollaries are fundamental for al-Kindī’s worldview-in which he places his propaganda for rational research in the Neoplatonic sense, G. Endress, The Circle of al-Kindī: Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy, in The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism. Studies on the Transmission of Greek Philosophy and Sciences dedicated to H.J. Drossart Lulfsw on his ninetieth birthday, ed. by G. Endress and R. Krul, Leiden 1997, pp. 43-76, the quotation, p. 53).
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Harmony between Plato and Aristotle, 12 according to which the pseudo-Theology provides a testimony of the deep coherence not only between Aristotle and Plato, but also between the entire philosophical tradition stemming from Greece and the Qur’anic revelation. It seems that the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle was read as crowning the theological part of Aristotle’s metaphysics still within the time of Ibn Sīnā and even later, as we may learn from the Treatise on metaphysical science (Kitāb fī ḫumā’īn al-tabī‘īn) by the physician and philosopher Abū al-Laylī ibn Yūsuf al-Bagdadī (1162-1231), who, two centuries later than Ibn Sīnā, locates as the conclusion of his companion on metaphysics. 13

Ibn Sīnā’s Notes on the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle 14 belonged in the almost completely lost Kitāb al-Injāf wa-l-Iṣlahīj; 15 the Book of fair judgment which was meant, according to Ibn Sīnā’s


13 This extremely interesting work, which is still unpublished as a whole, contains a compendium of Aristotle’s Metaphysics, except Book Lambda, which is dealt with at more length and on its own, immediately after the compendium of the Metaphysics. The compendium of Aristotle’s Book Lambda is followed by one of Alexander of Aphrodisias’ De providentia. The compendium of the Liber de causis follows, and also one of twenty propositions drawn from Proclus’ Elements of Theology, intermingled with five among the testimonia of Aristotle, which I divided into two groups, the Westerners and the Easterners, and I had the Easterners argue against the Westerners until I judged fairly when there was a real point of dispute between them. This book had contained approximately twenty-eight thousand questions. I commented clearly on the difficult passages in the original texts up to the end of the Theologia Aristotelis, despite the fact that the Theologia is somewhat suspect, and I talked about the oversights of the commentators (pp. 63-64).

14 The demonstration of this point — against the previous view that the “Westerners” Ibn Sīnā alluded to were the Greek commentators of Aristotle and the “Easterners” were the Arab ones — was made by Pines, “La ‘Philosophie Orientale’ d’Aristote et sa polémique contre les Bagdadis,” passim. See also H.B.V. Brown, “Aristote et le ‘Philosophie Orientale’ d’Aristote et sa polémique contre les Bagdadis,” passim. See also H.B.V. Brown, “Aristote et les Bagdadis,” passim.

15 The appearance to the K. al-Injāf of the Notes on the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle as well as of those on Book Lambda of the Metaphysics is stated by the Cairo ms quoted in the previous note: see Badawī, Arīṣī ‘inda l-ʿArab, p. 57.1 (notes on the pseudo-Theology) and p. 22.1 (notes on Book Lambda). As for the notes on Aristotle’s De Anima, which follow those on the pseudo-Theology (see Badawī, Arīṣī ‘inda l-ʿArab, pp. 75-121), the ms does not mention the K. al-Injāf; the title given to this work is Al-Dīr al-kutub ilʿālārī al-bayt al-maʾṣūm l-maʾṣūm fī al-bayt al-maṣūm (Badawī, Arīṣī ‘inda l-ʿArab, p. 75.1) but Badawī claimed, chiefly on the basis of the affinity in structure, that it belonged in the K. al-Injāf as well (Introduction, p. 28). Badawī was followed in this by S. Pines, “La ‘Philosophie Orientale’ d’Aristote et sa polémique contre les Bagdadis,” in Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age, 19 (1932), p. 1-37, in part. p. 10 n. 3

own words in the Letter to al-Kīyā, 18 to establish the correct exegesis of many difficult Aristotelian tenets about which the so-called “Western” school — the Christian commentators of Aristotle at Bagdad — and the “Eastern” one — Ibn Sīnā himself — were at variance. 19 In his comprehensive study on the composition and history of the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle, 20 Zimmermann takes into account Ibn Sīnā’s Notes and concludes that he made use of its original version, namely, the one which was produced within the circle of al-Kīyā, and not of the so-called “longer version,” namely, the one which gave rise to the Latin translation, and which bears additional probably inspired by Isma‘īlī thought. 19 Also, Zimmermann discusses the issue of the skepticism about the pseudo-Theology which apparently transpires from Ibn Sīnā’s Letter to al-Kīyā, and concludes that he held no doubts that the pseudo-Theology belonged to Aristotle’s school, if not that it was written by Aristotle himself. 20 More important for our purposes here, Zimmermann observes that “Avcinne’s references imply a canon of sources; a canon concluded, as he indicates in his Letter to al-Kīyā (…), by the Isma‘īlīs; a canon similar, therefore, to that charted by Baghdādi’s Metaphysics.” 21
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Now, if the philosophical materials on the Greek doctrines about the first principles of the universe Ibn Sīnā had at his disposal were arranged into a canon similar to the “Kindian” one reflected in al-Baḡdādī’s Kitāb fī ’ilm mā ba’d al-ṭabi‘a, it seems that one might assume without too much questioning that, since the latter contains the Liber de Causis, Ibn Sīnā too had access to it. On the contrary, some scholars in the past insisted upon the fact that he apparently does not make any use of the De causis, and this took as proof of the alleged lack of the De causis from the scene of Islamic philosophy of the classical age in the East. There would be little point in recalling here the arguments confirmed later on by E.K. Rowson, but even once established the origin of the Liber de Causis in the IX century Baghdad on such a firm basis as its stylistic and doctrinal affinities with other works produced within the circle of al-Kindī, the alleged lack of evidence of any knowledge whatsoever of the Liber de Causis in the works of al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā did not cease to trouble the scholars working in the field.22 Richard C. Taylor proposed a solution for this baffling fact which pivots on the possibility that the much wider and more famous pseudo-Theology obscured the Liber de Causis and made in some sense useless, in al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā’s eyes, to have recourse to it, since they had the pseudo-Theology at their disposal.23 In what follows, I would like to add a few pieces of evidence to the dossier of Ibn Sīnā’s Neoplatonic sources, discussing four passages from the Metaphysics of the Kitāb al-Sīfī,25 which are reminiscent, so it seems to me, not of the pseudo-Theology or of a unidentified Neoplatonic text, but of the Liber de Causis itself.


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(i) VII 4, p. 347.10 (p. 402.48-49) — The crucial fourth chapter of treatise VIII deals with the attributes (ṣifāt, proprietates) of the necessa esse. Ibn Sīnā opens the chapter by recalling the point he has just established at the end of chapter 3, namely, that the first agent principle (mabda’ awwal fī’l, principium prium agens) cannot be but one.27 True, he is talking in this chapter of the necessa esse, and the argument he has developed from the beginning of treatise VIII concerns the first principle in the series of efficient causes. But the referential identity between the principium prium agens and the necessa esse had already been established when, in treatise VI, Ibn Sīnā argued that in the metaphysical discourse—at variance with what happens in the physical one—the agent principle is not confined to the status of the beginning of movement, but is the true being of (mabda’ al-wujūd), i.e., the unique Creator.28 If so, the argument for the unicity of the first agent principle concludes also in the unicity of the necessa esse. Once recalled that the necessa esse cannot be but one,29 Ibn Sīnā proceeds to the next move, namely, to establish that the attributes which necessarily follow from the very fact of its being the necessa esse do not involve any composition whatsoever in it.30 Notwithstanding the manifest Neoplatonic inspiration of this claim, the argument supporting it parts company with the Neoplatonic doctrine of the lack of any relationship whatsoever in the First Principle. Whereas in Greek Neoplatonism, both for Plotinus and Proclus, the relationship between the derivative realities and the First Principle is univocal—in other terms, the derivative realities are related to the First Principle, but the reverse is not true—31 according to Ibn Sīnā the First Principle does have a relationship (idqā, relatio) with its derivatives. But this by no means implies that the First Principle is multiple or composite: its relationes are but comitantes essentiae (lawazim al-d-dī‘ā) and causae essentiae, which means that they come after the essence of the First Principle and are neither fundamentals nor parts of it.32 After having quickly solved a difficulty,33 Ibn Sīnā proceeds to the crucial point of the whole chapter: the First Principle does not possess a quidditas (maddhā’ya) but its own anitas (anniyya).34 In order to support this claim, he embarks upon an argument whose main steps are the following: the very notion of necessa esse indicates the quiddity of that principle, in precisely the same way as ‘one’ or ‘man’ indicate the quiddity of those realities.35 But once we take into account the nature of the First Principle of the uni...
verse, we realize that those philosophers who conceived of it as unique—discarding those who thought that there were many first principles—did so either because they sought to locate the first principle in this or that element and said that it was, or because they thought that the one itself (dat al-wabid) was the First Principle. This very fact shows that a difference exists between the quiddity which has ‘unity’ or ‘being’ as its predicates, and the one, or being, taken in itself, in so far as it is ‘one’ or ‘being’.36 This is why in the First Principle no composition whatsoever takes place. If we assume, for the sake of argument, that the quiddity ‘man’ exists by necessity, we still have a quiddity which exists by necessity: not so in the case of the First Principle. Far from being a quiddity which possesses the necess esse, the First Principle is the necess esse, and nothing more, unless one is ready to accept that it receives the necess esse from another principle than itself, a consequence which goes against its very definition.37 Another point Ibn Sīnā wants to establish is that everything which possesses both quidditas (māhīyya) and being (anītīs, anīya) is a derivative reality. The point is made by refusing to conceive of quiddity and being as two components of the given thing. ‘Being’ can either accompany a quiddity, and in this case the thing is, or not accompany the quiddity, and in this case the thing is not; which implies that being comes from something else than the given quiddity. This is why Ibn Sīnā calls it a comitans (lāzīm) of the given quiddity, namely, something which is not a part of its definition or nature but can accompany it, in which case the quiddity turns to be a real being. The hypothesis of a quiddity which in itself, i.e., in its very nature or definition, necessarily implies being is ruled out as absurd: such a quiddity would be anterior to its own being, in so far as it would receive it from itself. But if each and every quiddity which possesses being has it from another principle than itself, this proves the demonstrandum: everything which possesses being is a derivative reality. «Igitor omne habens quidditatem causatum est; et cetera, alia, excepto necesse esse, habent quidditates quae sunt per se possibiles esse, qui bus non accidit esse nisi extrinsecus».38

The conclusion Ibn Sīnā draws from this argument, so it seems to me, is reminiscent of the Liber de Causis. He says:

Far-l-awwadu l-māhīyya lahu, wa-dawāti l-māhīyyīn yafṣatu ‘alayhā al-wujūd mināhā, fa-huwa maqarradu l-wujūd ( ... ). Primus igitur non habet quidditatem, sed super habentia quidditatas fluit esse ab eo; ipse igitur est esse expoliatum ( ... ).39

36 VIII 4, Arabic: p. 344.14-345.5; Latin: p. 399.91-99.
37 VIII 4, Arabic: p. 345.6-346.3; Latin: p. 400.00-400.20.


The idea that the First Principle does not have any form and that for this reason is ‘pure being’ clearly echoes the Neoplatonic doctrine of the One, reshaped in the peculiar form it received in the Arabic version of Plotinus’ and Proclus’ writings. At variance with the Greek original texts, in the Arabic version of works a typical doctrine was worked out, a doctrine which conflates the original Plotinian tenet of the transcendence of the One with respect to any µορφὴ or εἶδος with the claim that this principle transcends them precisely in so far as it is ‘pure Being’, ἀνινή (or ὑώνυ) φασι. This doctrine is non-Plotinian and non-Proclean, and two attempts have been made in order to account for its presence in the Arabic Neoplatonic texts, which trace back both to Greek sources. Some scholars (Fines, Thillet, Taylor) think that this doctrine traces back to Porphyry, who parted company from Plotinus in his own commentary on the Parmenides and claimed that the One is τὸ εἶναι καθόσον.40 On the other hand, it has been suggested that the source of this peculiar doctrine is to be found in the works of the pseudo-Dionysius.41 At all events, in the three main Arabic Neoplatonic texts—the reworking of the Plotinian treatises, the Arabic translation of Proclus’ Elements of Theology edited by Endress, and the Liber de Causis—the topic of the transcendence of the One with respect to intelligible reality is coupled with the idea that it is so precisely because the true One is ‘pure Being’ as well. In the above-mentioned passage, Ibn Sīnā does not quote literally one or other of the Arabic Neoplatonic sources which are likely to lie in the background of his assessment: the terminology he adopts is his own, as is clearly indicated by his favourite expression μουγγαράτ al-wujūd, esse expoliatum, a syntagma which reformulates in Ibn Sīnā’s proper terms the definition of the First Principle as ‘pure being’—ἀνινή (or ὑώνυ) φασι, literally, ‘solely being’—of the Arabic Neoplatonica of the circle of al-Kindī.42 The transcendence of the First Principle with respect to everything which possesses quiddity is reformulated by Ibn Sīnā in his own terminology as well. Not that the term mhīyya does not appear in the Arabic Neoplatonica,43 but it is not used to deny the presence of quiddity in the First Principle: in order to express this idea, the Arabic Plotinus has recourse to the typical couple ὑώνυ wa-sūra, “shape and form”; the Arabic Proclus, at times, makes use also of ἱσύς, “quality”, for this purpose.44 But even though Ibn Sīnā

42 For the syntagma ὑώνυ wa-sūra in the Arabic Neoplatonica see Badawi, Alīthīn inda l-ʿArab, pp. 67.14; 71.15, 16; 147.14, 15; 160.12; 161.7; 179.2; 197.9; for the syntagma ὑώνυ wa-sūra, see p. 161.2.
43 In the Arabic Plotinus mhīyya is not referred to the First Principle but to soul: see Badawi, Alīthīn inda l-ʿArab, p. 45.5. The synonym expression µουγγαράτ ὑώνυ parallelis Plotinis to τό ἐξ ἑνῶν at p. 69.17 Badawi, but once again it is referred to intellect and not to the First Principle.
44 For the typical couple ὑώνυ wa-sūra see Endress, Proclus Arabus (quoted above, n. 5), pp. 134-139; 212. The term ὑώνυ is not so often used in the Arabic Plotinus: see Badawi, Alīthīn inda l-ʿArab, p. 38.9; 46.2; 6; 94; 112.15-16. ὑώνυ parallelis Plotinis notarya at p. 45.12; 46.1 and 13. In the Arabic version of prop. 73 of Proclus’ Elements of Theology an interpolated passage claims that the First Cause is ὑώνυ wa-sūra because it has no ἱσύς whatsoever: see Endress, Proclus Arabus, p. 25.18 (Arabic text).
The idea that the First Principle does not have any form and that for this reason is ‘pure being’ clearly echoes the Neoplatonic doctrine of the One, reshaped in the peculiar form it received in the original version of Plotinus’ and Proclus’ writings. At variance with the Greek original texts, in the Arabic version of their works a typical doctrine was worked out, a doctrine which conflates the original Plotinian tenet of the transcendence of the One with respect to any μορφή or εἶδος with the claim that this principle transcends them precisely in so far as it is ‘pure Being’, ἀρνία (or οὐχως) ίανατ. This doctrine is non-Plotinian and non-Proclean, and two attempts have been made in order to account for its presence in the Arabic Neoplatonic texts, which trace back both to Greek sources.

Some scholars (Fines, Thiliet, Taylor) think that this doctrine traces back to Porphyry, who parted company from Plotinus in his own commentary on the Parmenides and claimed that the One is οὐχος το εἶναι προσακοποος. On the other hand, it has been suggested that the source of this peculiar doctrine is to be found in the works of the pseudo-Dionysius.

At all events, in the three main Arabic Neoplatonic texts—the reworking of the Plotinian treatises, the Arabic translation of Proclus’ Elements of Theology edited by Endress, and the Liber de Causis—the topic of the transcendence of the One with respect to intelligible reality is coupled with the idea that it is so precisely because the true One is ‘pure Being’ as well. In the above-mentioned passage, Ibn Sīnā does not quote literally one or other of the Arabic Neoplatonic sources which are likely to lie in the background of his assessment: the terminology he adopts is his own, as is clearly indicated by his favourite expression ὑπέρ τούτον το εἶναι προσακοποος, a syntagma which reformulates in Ibn Sīnā’s proper terms the definition of the First Principle as ‘pure Being’—ἀρνία ίανατ (or οὐχως ίανατ: literally, ‘solely being’) of the Arabic Neoplatonica of the circle of al-Kindī. The transcendence of the First Principle with respect to everything which possesses quiddity is reformulated by Ibn Sīnā in his own terminology as well. Not that the term μορφή does not appear in the Arabic Neoplatonica, but it is not used to deny the presence of quiddity in the First Principle: in order to express this idea, the Arabic Plotinus has recourse to the typical couple θύλλα ως-θύρνα, ‘shape and form’; the Arabic Proclus, at times, makes use also of κατακτήμα, ‘quality’, for this purpose. But even though Ibn Sīnā
The passages of the Arabic Plotinus where the First Principle—be it called True One, First Cause, God Almighty, or Creator—is said to be ‘pure Being’ are many,50 but there is one in particular which might have inspired Ibn Sīnā. In this passage, two of the doctrinal features of Ibn Sīnā’s own passage are present, namely, the shapeless nature of the First Principle (lā wāḥidi’ah ṣāhīḥah in Ibn Sīnā’s account) and its denomination as ‘pure Being’ (muqarrad al-wujūd in Ibn Sīnā’s account). The passage is found in the collection of the ‘Sayings of the Greek sage’51 and is related to the following passage in Eunead V 1 [10], 7.20-21:

\[(...) τετεθη χαρ ποινος ει εκβοι, ότι μη τινων \text{κατεξε} \text{κεκομενος} \text{μονον} \text{γαρ} \text{εν} \text{εκβοι}(...)\]

For this is how all things come from him, because he is not confined by any shape; that One is one alone (transl. Armstrong).

The Arabic rendering of this passage amplifies, as usual, the Greek of Plotinus, adding both a monotheistic interpretation of Plotinus’ One and a peculiar interpretation of its shapeless nature:

The First Creator does not resemble any thing, because all things are from Him and because He has no shape (bihiya) and no special, inherent form (ṣīrah). The First Creator is absolutely one, i.e., He is mere being (annya faqsat) without any peculiar attribute (ṣīfah). All attributes break forth from that being (transl. Rosenthal).52

This passage of the Arabic Plotinus counts, so it seems to me, as one of the sources of the passage of the Liber de Causis I have quoted before.53 The same addition, namely, the interpretation of the Neoplatonic One as annya faqsat or hasi’ah faqsat, as well as the account of this feature in terms of lack of any attribute (ṣīfah) or quality (ṣayfiyya), appears also in the interpolated passages which accompany the Arabic translation of props. 2, 21, 73 and 74 of the Proclus Arabus edited by Endress.54 My guess is that this topic has been worked out first in the paraphrasis of V 1[10], and that, by circulating within the circle of al-Kindī, it influenced both the translator of Proclus’ Elements of Theology and the author of the Liber de Causis. But I have two reasons for not thinking that the passage of the Arabic Plotinus preserved in the doxography of the ‘Greek Sage’ counts also as the source of Ibn Sīnā’s statement.

First, in reading the three passages in parallel—the one from the Arabic Plotinus, the one by Ibn Sīnā and the one by Ibn Babwī—it is easy to see that it is only in the De causis that...

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50 In addition to the passages quoted above, n. 42, see also Badawi, Afiṣāf ‘inda l’Arab, pp. 27.2; 51.8; 87.10; 131.3, 14.15, 132.9.18 (al-anṣāy al-faqsat); pp. 26.8; 27.5 (al-anṣāy al-faqsat); p. 113.14 (al-anṣāy al-faqsat); pp. 134.13 (al-huwa’ah al-faqsat); p. 135.13 (al-huwa’ah al-faqsat); p. 137.21 (al-huwa’ah al-faqsat). See Rosenthal, ‘Allaṣ–al-Yānis and the Arabic Plotinus Source’ (quoted above n. 4) and Aouad, ‘La Théologie d’Aristote et autres textes du ‘Platônis Arabes’ (quoted above, n. 2), pp. 574-580.


52 I have tried to support this claim in the paper quoted above, n. 48.
is not quoting this or that passage verbatim, he is not echoing a generic inspiration either. The tenet that the First Principle has no form whatsoever, indeed is pure being, and that precisely for this reason it pours forth being onto all things, is by no means unprecedented. In the Liber de Causis, this doctrine is stated as follows:

wa-l-qal'ah dihi bhiyatuna anna-hah namya wa-yara wa-khadathaka l-muuf'da dahu bhiyatun wa-l-tab'ata dahu bhiyatun wa-layasa li-l-illati l-dha bhiyatun anna-hah amun yata faqi. Fa-in gilla q'illa ladda min an yakhira lahah bhiyatun, q'illa bhiyatun li-nihayyahuwa wa-yadha l-hayra l-muuf'da 'ala l-qal'ah jam'at l-bhayrat wa-'ala sa'i l-tas'dfd bi-tawassasst l-qal'ah.46

And the intelligence possesses shape because it is being and form, and likewise soul possesses shape and nature possesses shape, but the First Cause does not have shape because He is only being. If someone says: He must have shape, we say: His shape is infinite and his essential nature is the Pure Good pouring forth all goods on the intelligence and on all other things through the mediation of intelligence (transl. Taylor).47

True, the idea that the First Principle is ‘pure Being’ is not exclusive of the Liber de Causis: on the contrary, it is common to all the Neoplatonic texts which are likely to have been available to Ibn Sīnā, and in particular it occurs in the pseudo-Theology he commented upon.48 Moreover, the topic of the shapeless nature of the First Principle seems to have been worked out in the Arabic Plotinus, and transmitted from the Arabic Plotinus to the Arabic Proclus, namely, to the Arabic translation of the Elements of Theology and to the Liber de Causis.49 So, one is spontaneously inclined to say that it was in the pseudo-Theology that Ibn Sīnā found the doctrine of the passage quoted above, and that there is no reason to have recourse to the Liber de Causis in order to account for it. But a closer inspection shows that he is likely to have in his memory the passage of the De causis.


47 Liber de Causis, prop. 8(1), pp. 78-8-9.1 Bardenhewer, p. 12-17 Badawi.

48 Taylor, The Liber de Causis (Kālin fi maqāl al-bayyin), A Study of Medieval Neoplatonism, pp. 299-300.

49 Ibn Sīnā commented upon a long passage of chapter I of the pseudo-Theology which is totally independent from Plotinus (Badawi, Alfiha, "As-Sayb al-Yānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source") (quoted above n. 41), pp. 77-50, on the grounds of the fact that the topic of the First Cause as amīna faqat, having no biyya neither given, appears in the Arabic Plotinus and in the Arabic Proclus as well (both in the Proclus Arabus edited by Endress and in the Liber de Causis creates a shift towards the idea that it was first worked out in the adaptation of Plotinus, and later endorsed by the translator of Proclus' Elements of Theology and by the author of the Liber de Causis.

The passages of the Arabic Plotinus where the First Principle — be it called True One, First Cause, God Almighty, or Creator — is said to be ‘pure Being’ are many,50 but there is one in particular which might have inspired Ibn Sīnā. In this passage, two of the doctrinal features of Ibn Sīnā’s own passage are present, namely, the shapeless nature of the First Principle (lā māhīya lahā in Ibn Sīnā’s account) and its denomination as ‘pure Being’ (muḥarrad al-wujūd in Ibn Sīnā’s account). The passage is found in the collection of the ‘Sayings of the Greek sage’51 and is related to the following passage in EnnEad V 1 [10], 7.20-21:

(...) tukh tawassu,ti qiila qii'ilun lii anni)atun faqa,t. ( ... ) for this is how all things come from him, because he is not confined by any shape; that One is one alone (transl. Armstrong).

The Arabic rendering of this passage amplifies, as usual, the Greek of Plotinus, adding both a monotheistic interpretation of Plotinus’ One and a peculiar interpretation of its shapeless nature:

The First Creator does not resemble any thing, because all things are from Him and because He has no shape (biyya) and no special, inherent form (ẓāira). The First Creator is absolutely one, i.e., He is mere being (a'amya faqat) without any peculiar attribute (ṣifā). All attributes break forth from that being (transl. Rosenthal).52

This passage of the Arabic Plotinus counts, so it seems to me, as one of the sources of the passage of the Liber de Causis I have quoted before.53 The same addition, namely, the interpretation of the Neoplatonic One as a'amya faqat or hawwya faqat, as well as the account of this feature in terms of lack of any attribute (ṣifā) or quality (kayfyā), appears also in the interpolated passages which accompany the Arabic translation of props. 2, 21, 73 and 74 of the Proclus Arabus edited by Endress.54 My guess is that this topic has been worked out first in the paraphrasis of V 1[10], and that, by circulating within the circle of al-Kindī, it influenced both the translator of Proclus’ Elements of Theology and the author of the Liber de Causis. But I have two reasons not thinking that the passage of the Arabic Plotinus preserved in the dialectography of the ‘Greek Sage’ counts also as the source of Ibn Sīnā’s statement.

First, in reading the three passages in parallel — the one from the Arabic Plotinus, the one from the Liber de Causis and the one by Ibn Sīnā — it is easy to see that it is only in the De causis that


51 See Rosenthal, «As-Sayb al-Yānī and the Arabic Plotinus Source» (quoted above n. 4) and Aouda, La Théologie d’Aristote et autres textes du ’Plotinus Arabes’ (quoted above, n. 2), pp. 574-580.


53 See my "Cause prime non est Wahrheit", Liber de Causis, prop. 8(9) [le fonti e la dottrina], in Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale, 1 (1990), pp. 327-351 and note 48 above.

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all the three elements which do appear in Ibn Sīnā's statement are present together, namely (i) the idea that the First Principle is 'pure Being', (ii) because it has no quiddity, (iii) and that it pours forth being onto things which possess quiddity. Items (i) and (ii) appear in the Arabic Plotinus. In the passage from the Liber de Causis the items (i)-(iii) appear together, and for this reason it seems sensible to accept it as the source of Ibn Sīnā's statement. True, one might object that in Ibn Sīnā's passage we are told that the First Principle - Pure Being pours forth being onto the things which possess quiddity, and in the passage from the Liber de Causis we are told that it pours forth "all the goods" onto the derivative realities. But the idea that the First Cause, which is only being and pure being, pours forth being onto the derivative realities which are endowed by this or that form-life, intelligence, movement—by subordinate immanent principles is a typical feature of the Liber de Causis. This topic had few chances of appearing as such in the Arabic Plotinus, in so far as it is an interpretation of a typical Proclean tenet, namely, the causality of the three main principles ὁ γὰρ πάντα καὶ ὁ πάντα ἐν, the first life gives life to what is below it, not in the manner of origination, but in the manner of form. And, likewise, the intelligence gives knowledge and the other things to what is below it only in the manner of form, not in the manner of origin, because the manner of origin belongs to the First Cause alone (transl. Taylor).55

When the author of the Liber de Causis—still in a passage which has no Greek antecedent, i.e., the one quoted above from proposition 8[9]—maintains that the First Principle pours forth "all goods" onto the things which possess shape, in the light of the present passage one can confidently say that this means that it pours forth first and foremost being. Or at least so it seems in Ibn Sīnā's eyes, even though his own notion of being is obviously different from the one we can glean from the assessments scattered in the Liber de Causis, and is original to him. To sum up, I am inclined to think that Ibn Sīnā's passage is redolent of the passage of proposition 8[9] of the Liber de Causis quoted above, and that in taking from it his inspiration Ibn Sīnā is aware of the passage of proposition 17[18] just quoted, where the First Cause is said to pour forth being onto all its derivatives.

The second, additional reason I have for thinking that the proximate source of Ibn Sīnā's tenet is the passage of the Liber de Causis, and not the passage of the Arabic Plotinus, is that the latter does not appear in the pseudo-Theology. As we have just seen, it comes from V 1[10] and is preserved in the doxography of the 'Greek Sage'. As happens in general for the entire tradition of the Arabic Plotinus, in the case of V 1[10] too one is struck by the fact that the actual remaining parts of the translation of treatises from Enneads IV-VI—I.e., the pseudo-Theology, the pseudo-Farabian Epistle on the Divine Science and the "Sayings of the Greek Sage"—follow a sort of chess-board pattern. In other words, the Arabic texts preserved in the three actual testimonies of it, albeit deriving from one and the same translation—as has been shown with compelling arguments by Kraus, Rosenthal, Endress and Zimmermann—do not overlap, if not only at times and for short portions. In the case of V 1[10], the chess-board is the following:

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<thead>
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<td>VIII, B. 108.5-114.18—D. 104.9-112.10</td>
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<td>8.1-10</td>
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<td>10.24-30 11.1-12.20</td>
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As this table shows, the passage of the 'Sayings of the Greek Sage' related to V 1[10], 7.19-20—which inspired in all likelihood the author of the Liber de Causis for his proposition 8[9]—does not belong in those where the pseudo-Theology and the 'Sayings of the Greek Sage' overlap. This is to say, a reader of the pseudo-Theology in the form it came down to us could not have had access to it. Ibn Sīnā was such a reader, as Zimmermann contends57 and as a detailed inspection of his


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We resume and say, then, that the First Entity (al-huwa‘y al-ilāh) is quiescent and is the cause of causes, and if He gives all things entity (al-huwa‘ya), He gives it in the manner of origination. The first life gives life to what is below it, not in the manner of origination, but in the manner of form. And, likewise, the intelligence gives knowledge and the other things to what is below it only in the manner of form, not in the manner of origination, because the manner of origination belongs to the First Cause alone (transf. Taylor).55

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Notes confirms. Of course, the possibility exists that the passage will also source, preserving that part of the Arabic translation and paraphrase of V 1[10], and one should not force an argument taken from the remaining parts of the transmission, in the case of such a complex textual tradition, so many aspects of which are still obscure. But the fact remains that the passage which, in the Arabic Plotinus, resembles more to Ibn Sīnā’s statement does not belong in the part of the translation-paraphrase he had at his immediate disposal in the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle.

As a conclusion of the analysis of the relationship among the texts which are the best candidates for having been the source of Ibn Sīnā’s claim that the First does not possess quidditas and pours forth being onto the habentia quidditates, I would like to stress once again that this amount only to stating that the passage quoted from the Metaphysics of the Kitāb al-Ṣifā’ echoes the De causis passage. Ibn Sīnā’s use of his source is free: not only the terminology is his own, but also the philosophical implications he draws from the doctrine of the Liber de Causis are original.

(ii) VIII 4, p. 348.5-6 (p. 403.69-73) — Still in the same chapter of treatise VIII, Ibn Sīnā contends that the First Principle cannot be known by means of a definition or a demonstration, in so far as it does not possess a cause:

wa-lā dālīka fa-inna l-anwala lā fāṣila lāhā, wa-lā lā ḏnūs lāhā wa-lā ḏnūs lāhā wa-lā ḏnūs lāhā, wa-lā lā būhāna ‘alayhī, lā-anna ḏnūs lā ḏnūs lāhā.

Ei ide non habet differentiam; quia enim non habet genus, nec habet differentiam,ideo non habet definitionem. Nec fit demonstratio de eo quia ipse non habet causam.58

The Arab philosophers were acquainted since al-Kindī’s time with the idea that the First Principle transcends not only every predicative assessment, but also the ontological basis which is presupposed by predication, namely, the classification according to genera and species.59 But Ibn Sīnā does not limit himself to recall this topos; indeed he points to a reason why the First Principle cannot be known according to the usual way taken in demonstrative science, i.e., a definition; and the reason given recalls, so it seems to me, the following passage of proposition 5[6] of the Liber de Causis:

Fa-mīn dālīka jārā l-anwala wa-dālīha yafūtu l-sīfata wa-īmāmā kāna kādālīka l-anna ḏnā hāsaya sāfāqātī l-ilāmin ya-rufu bi-hā, wa-kullu ṣay‘ in īmāmā ya-rufu wa-yafūtā min ṣīfār ilā ilāhil ṣay‘a l-ilmāmin bi-ma‘lātim lām bi-yālīmin ḏnā wa-lā yafūtā l-anna ḏnā hāsaya yāqūba bi-ma‘lātim lām bi-ma‘lātim lām bi-ma‘lātim lām bi-ma‘lātim lām bi-ma‘lātim.

58 VIII 4, Arabic: p. 348.5-6; Latin, p. 403.69-73. I owe to Marc Geoffrey the observation that the words which follow immediately in the Arabic, wa-lā dālīka lā lā ḏnūs lāhā, should be read wa-lā dālīka lā ḏnūs lāhā, and allude to opposition between mi and lāmi: about God, the question ‘lāmā?’ cannot be asked, in so far as it does not possess a cause; by implication, it cannot be known through a būhāna but only through a dālīka, which is represented by God’s effects.

Notes confirms. Of course, the possibility exists that it had access also to other sources, preserving that part of the Arabic translation and paraphrase of V 𝑇, and one should not force an argument taken from the remaining parts of the transmission, in the case of such a complex textual tradition, so many aspects of which are still obscure. But the fact remains that the passage which, in the Arabic Plotinus, resembles more to Ibn Sinā’s statement does not belong in the part of the translation-paraphrase he had at his immediate disposal in the pseudo-Theology of Aristotle.

As a conclusion of the analysis of the relationship among the texts which are the best candidates for having been the source of Ibn Sinā’s claim that the First Principle does not possess quidditas and pours forth being onto the habenita quidditates, I would like to stress once again that this amounts only to stating that the passage quoted from the Metaphysics of the Kitāb al-Šīf’ echoes the De causis passage. Ibn Sinā’s use of his source is free: not only the terminology is his own, but also the philosophical implications he draws from the doctrine of the Liber de causis are original.

(ii) VIII 4, p. 348.5-6 (p. 403.69-73) — Still in the same chapter of treatise VIII, Ibn Sinā contends that the First Principle cannot be known by means of a definition or a demonstration, in so far as it does not possess a cause:

wa-la-dālīka fa-inna l-anwala fālāshah laḥā, wa-īd lā gnsa laḥā wā-lā fasla laḥā fa-lā hadda laḥā, wa-lā bahrāna ’alayhi, li-annahu li-illata laḥā. 65

E iede non habet differentiam; quia enim non habet genus, nec habet differentiam, ideo non habet definitionem. Nec fit demonstratio de eo quia ipse non habet causam. 66

The Arab philosophers were acquainted since al-Kindī’s time with the idea that the First Principle transcends not only every predicative assessment, but also the ontological structure which is presupposed by predication, namely, the classification according to genera and species. 67 But Ibn Sinā does not limit himself to recall this topos; indeed he points to a reason why the First Principle cannot be known according to the usual way taken in demonstrative science, i.e., through a definition; and the reason given recalls, so it seems to me, the following passage of proposition 5[6] of the Liber de Causis:


65 VIII 4, Arabic: p. 348.5-6, Latin: p. 403.69-73. I owe to Marc Geoffroy the observation that the words which follow immediately in the Arabic, wa-la-dālīka jāra l-anwālu wadālīhi, should be read wa-lā dālīka li-timā laḥā, and allude to opposition between timā and lātimā: about God, the question “lātimā” cannot be asked, in so far as it does not possess a cause; by implication, it cannot be known through a barhāna but only through a daff, which is represented by God’s effects.


67 Of course, one might think that Ibn Sinā is just recalling the well-known Aristotelian doctrine which is presupposed in this passage of the Liber de Causis and, in turn, in Proclus’ proposition which lies in its background. 68 But the fact that Ibn Sinā makes use of this Aristotelian topic in precisely the same way as the author of the Liber de Causis does, and in precisely the same context, namely, the discussion of the ṣīfāt of the First Principle, creates once again a drift towards the conclusion that he was aware of the passage quoted.

(iii) VIII 6, p. 355.9-12 (p. 412.59-64) and IV 3, p. 188.5-189.11 (p. 215.17-216.34) — In chapter 6 of treatise VIII, we are told that the ncess esse transcends even perfection: it is favqā al-tamām, plus quam perfectum. 69 In a purely Neoplatonic vein, Ibn Sinā indicates as the cause of this status the fact that its esse is not confined to itself but pours forth onto the derivative realities, giving them their own esse. 70 Earlier in the Metaphysics of the Kitāb al-Šīf’, he had already credited the First Principle with transcendence to perfection itself. In chapter 3 of treatise IV, dealing with the notions ‘perfection’, ‘imperfection’, ‘transcendence to perfection’ and ‘totality’, he had already quoted the tenet of those “wise men” (ḥakamā) who credited the First Principle with the status of transcendence to perfection itself (favqā al-tamām). According to those wise men, in Ibn Sinā’s report, the First Principle lies not only above what is imperfect, but also above what is perfect, which, in his interpretation, is the intelligible world and Intellect. 71

It is tempting to see in this allusion a quotation of proposition 21[22] of the Liber de Causis, where the First Principle is said to create in so far as it is above perfection itself — favqa al-tamām, reproducing Proclus’ ṣuṣrāmātēs. 72 As a fact of matter, the striking similarity between Ibn Sinā’s...
statement and the proposition 21[22] of the Liber does not count in itself as a proof of his knowledge of this text, in so far as the same doctrine and terminology is found also in the pseudo-Theology, paralleling a passage of V 2[11] where Plotinus is speaking about the One as ύπερπλήρεις. Not only so, but one can confidently say that the source of Ibn Sīna's account of the opinion of the ḫukāmā' about the First Principle as fawāq al-tamām is precisely the passage of the pseudo-Theology. The identity the “wise men” stated, according to Ibn Sīna, between the “perfect” and the intelligible world - Intellect 68 is explicitly uttered in the passage of the pseudo-Theology. 69 This detail, which is peculiar to the pseudo-Theology in so far as it appears in a passage which has no correspondent in Greek, makes clear that the paraphrasing of V 2[11] is the source of Ibn Sīna's statement. What is more intriguing is the fact that in the next sentence he proceeds to establish a threefold hierarchy—the principle which is perfect; the sufficiens (al-muktafī); the insufficiens (al-nāqīs) — which is not present as such in the passage of the pseudo-Theology, but is still attributed by Ibn Sīnā to the ḫukāmā' mentioned at the beginning of this section: wa-ẓa‘alā dāna l-tamāmī ẓay‘ānyi: al-muktajī wa-l-nāqīs. 68

True, this hierarchy can be derived, in principle, from the passage of the pseudo-Theology as well; 70 but Ibn Sīna's terminology and thought is more akin to the above-mentioned proposition 21[22] of the Liber de Causis. Echoing Proclus' threefold hierarchy ύπερπλήρεις - ἀμεταπόθεται - ἀμεταλληκτον, 71 the author of the Liber de Causis states that the absolute transcendence of the First Cause depends upon the fact that it is not only perfect, but above perfection. In fact, it does not simply transcend what is imperfect—diminutum, nāqīs—but also what is perfect—completum, tamīm—, and consequently it is supra completum, fawāq al-tamām. 72 The reason for this has been given immediately before:

66  V 2[11], 1.7-9: ὅν γὰρ τέλον τοῦ μαθήματος ἐπιθύμησεν μὴ δεῖχθαι οὖν ὑπερεκρήτικο διὸ καὶ τὸ ὑπερπληρέα, σημείωνται ἀκόμα ὧν. This text gives rise in the Arabic paraphrase to the following passage: ἵνα τούτῳ ἀληθεύσῃ ὅτι οὐκ Εὐχάριον δόθηκεν τῇ ἱλορήσει καὶ τῷ ὑπερπλήρῳ καὶ τῷ ὑπερνικτρικῷ τῇ ἔκκλησει. This text is echoed by Ibn Sīna in the passage quoted above, n. 3, p. 291.

67  See above, n. 64. The relevant part of Ibn Sīna's statement, in the Arabic, is p. 189.1: wa-ẓa‘alā maraba hā l-tamāmī li-ṣafīna mina l-ṣafīlāl al-mufārāquātī.

68  See above, n. 66. I owe to Ahmed Hasnaoui the remark that in the entire chapter Ibn Sīnā does not indicate by the term ḫukāmā' a specific "group" of thinkers, but the thinkers or authors in general, without committing himself to accept or refuse the doctrines quoted.

69  IV 3, Arabic: p. 189.4; Latin: p. 216.35-36. What follows in Ibn Sīnā's sentence counts as an explanation of his own: "Sufficiens (al-muktafī) is not an attribute of perfection, but rather a constituent of perfection." Insufficiens (al-nāqīs) vero absolutum est id quod eget alioque quod attribuit sibi completionem post completionem (pp. 216.36-217.39; Arabic: p. 189.4-6).

70  See n. 66.

71  Et th. 131, p. 116.18-23 Dodds: οὐδέν γὰρ τὸ ἐκλείπον ὀκεύον τοῖς θεοὶς οὐδέν τὸ πλῆρες μόνον, τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἐκλεῖον πάντα ἁπάντα ὑπάρχει, ἀλλὰ ἄλλο τέλον ποιεῖται, οὐχ ὡς τὸ πλῆρος ὑπάρχει, ἀλλὰ ὡς τὸ ἐκλείπον ὑπάρχει, ἀπὸ τῆς ἄμεταπόθετος ὑπερπλήρους σημείου, ὑπερεκρήτου διὰ ἑνὸς ἐκ τῶν πλεονεκρῶν ἄλλου καὶ ἕκα ἄλλο διεκτέως τὰς τοὺς κατά. 72 Liber de Causis, prop. 21[22], p. 99.8-9 Bardenhewer, p. 22.14-23.1 Bardenhewer.
statement and the proposition 21[22] of the Liber does not count in itself as a proof of his knowledge of this text, in so far as the same doctrine and terminology is found also in the pseudo-Theology, paralleling a passage of V 2[11] where Plotinus is speaking about the One as ὑπερπαλατής.66 Not only so, but one can confidently say that the source of Ibn Sīna’s account of the opinion of the ḥukamā’ about the First Principle as ἡωqā al-tamām is precisely the passage of the pseudo-Theology. The identity the “wise men” stated, according to Ibn Sīna, between the “perfect” and the intelligible world - Intellect67 is explicitly uttered in the passage of the pseudo-Theology.68 This detail, which is peculiar to the pseudo-Theology in so far as it appears in a passage which has no correspondent in Greek, makes clear that the paraphrase of V 2[11] is the source of Ibn Sīna’s statement. What is more intriguing is the fact that in the next sentence he proceeds to establish a threefold hierarchy —the principle which is perfect; the sufficiens (al-mukṭaf); the insufficient (al-nāqīs)— which is not present as such in the passage of the pseudo-Theology, but is still attributed by Ibn Sīna to the ḥukamā’ mentioned at the beginning of this section:

wa-ya’sī allāt dīnā l-tamāmī lā say’ahnu: al-mukṭafīya wa-l-nāqiṣa.

Id autem quod est infra perfectum posuerunt duo, scilicet sufficiens et insufficiens.69

True, this hierarchy can be derived, in principle, from the passage of the pseudo-Theology as well;70 but Ibn Sīna’s terminology and thought is more akin to the above-mentioned proposition 21[22] of the Liber de Causis. Echoing Proclus’ threefold hierarchy ὑπερπαλατής - πλατής - ἐλλειπτον,71 the author of the Liber de Causis states that the absolute transcendence of the First Cause depends upon the fact that it is not only perfect, but above perfection. In fact, it does not simply transcend what is imperfect —diminutum, nāqīs— but also what is perfect —completum, tamūm—, and consequently it is supra completum, fawqā al-tamām.72 The reason for this has been given immediately before:

66 V 2[11], 1.7-9: ὃν γὰρ τέλον τοῦ μηθῶν (ἱπτερον μηθὺς ἔχοντες) κεῖτο δὲ ἐπειδή οὖν ὑπερκριτή καὶ τὸ ὑπερπαλατής, εἶπε μεταβατῖκον ἄλλο. This text gives rise in the Arabic paraphrase to the following passage: «say too that the Absolute is One above completeness and perfection (fawqā al-tamām wa-l-kamāl), the sensible world is defective (nāqīṣ) because it is originated from the complete thing (al-lay’s al-tamūm), which is mind; mind is complete and perfect because it is originated from the true absolute One, which is above completeness», Badaw!, Aftah ‘inda l-Arab, p. 134.16-135.2; Lewis’ translation (quoted above, n. 3), p. 291.
67 See above, n. 64. The relevant part of Ibn Sīna’s statement, in the Arabic, is p. 189.1: wa-ya’sī allāt muktaba’ta l-tamūmi li-‘aqīn mina l-‘aqīl al-mufṣiqati.
68 See above, n. 66. I owe to Ahmed Harraoui the remark that in the entire chapter Ibn Sīna does not indicate by the term ḥukamā’ a specific “group” of thinkers, but the thinkers or authors in general, without committing himself to accept or refuse the doctrines quoted.
69 IV 3, Arabic: p. 189.4; Latin: p. 216.35-36. What follows in Ibn Sīna’s sentence counts as an explanation of his own: «Sufficiens (al-mukṭaf) est id cui attributum est aliquid per quod acquisitum est ei complementum sui in seipso. Insufficiens (al-nāqīs) vero absolute est id quod eget alio quod attribuat sibi completionem post completionem» (pp. 216.36-217.39; Arabic: p. 189.4-5).
70 See n. 66.
71 El. th. 131, p. 116.18-23 Daddi: oltē γὰρ τὸ ἐλέετον αἰκεῖν τὸς θεὸς ὅτι τὸ τέλεος μόνον τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἐλέετον πᾶυ πᾶν ἄπειρον ἀπερχόμενον, καὶ ἄλλα τέλον πολλαὶ ὁμότι πέρα τε ἐπηρέατης ἀνταρχήτως ἀπερχόμενον, ἀπερχόμενον τὸ δὲ πλήρως ὀρθότως μόνον ὁμότι δὲ ἐκ μεταβατικῶν ἐξουσιών, ὑπερκριτῆς δὲ ἐκ τῶν κοινωνικῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἐκ τὰ ἄλλα διετέλεσεν τὰς ἐκπολεμώσεις;
72 Liber de Causis, prop. 21[22], p. 99.8-9 Badaw!; p. 22.14-23.1 Badaw!;
74 See above, n. 62.
75 VIII 6, Arabic: p. 355.11-12; Latin: p. 412.62-64.

This is the passage which seems to lie in the background of Ibn Sīna’s threefold hierarchy of fa’wqā al-tamām —namely, the necesse esse,— al-tamūm, al-mukṭaf—namely, Intellect and the intelligible world—and al-nāqīṣ—which is the world of coming-to-be and passing away. Not only because of the terminology —the term mukṭaf appears in the De causis passage, but not in the one from the pseudo-Theology,— but also because of the emphasis put on the hierarchy of the three levels, which lacks in the passage of the pseudo-Theology and counts, on the contrary, as the very focus of the passage of the De causis. There is a shift in Ibn Sīna’s terminology, because when the necesse esse is said to be fa’wqā al-tamām, Intellect is called al-tamūm; on the other hand, when he mentions the two subordinate degrees al-mukṭaf and al-nāqīṣ, the first degree (the necesse esse) is called simply al-tamūm. This means that he feels free to rework in his own way the doctrine he is gleaming from his sources. But this does not prevent this passage from counting as an interesting case in point. In fact, if the analysis I have made is correct, Ibn Sīna is echoing both the pseudo-Theology and the Liber de Causis under the common heading of the “opinion of the ḥukamā’”. He deals with both the Neoplatonic texts, the pseudo-Theology and the De causis, as with one and the same source, even though he subdivision of what comes after the first into the two degrees al-mukṭaf and al-nāqīṣ does not come from the passage of the pseudo-Theology, but from the Liber de Causis. Ibn Sīna credits also with this doctrine the ḥukamā’ he mentioned at the beginning of this passage.

Something similar happens also in the passage from VIII 6 I began with. After having claimed that the necesse esse is above perfection73—a claim which in all likelihood traces back to the same source as the one of the passage from IV 3 we have just discussed, namely, the pseudo-Theology,— Ibn Sīna says:

wa-yafībī l-wuṣfī bi-dātih bayyin mahdun, wa-l-hayr bi-l-ğamlati huwa ma yatada‘nuwaquhī kullu say’in huwa l-wuṣfī, anāma l-wuṣfī min bālī l-wuṣfī.

Necesse esse per se est bonitas pura, et bonitatem desiderat omnino quicquid est; id autem quod desiderat omnis res est esse et perfectio esse, inquantum est esse. 75
The derivation of Intellect from the First Principle bi-lā bi-tawassut and of everything else through the mediation of Intellect is a typical doctrine of the Arabic Plotinus, which was endorsed, in turn, by the author of the Liber de Causis. Ibn Sīnā is clearly aware of this typical feature of the Arabic Plotinus, even though he transforms it and puts it in the service of his own reasoning about the status of the intelligibles within the divine mind: he is in fact dealing here with the intellecta as they are first in essentia primi and secondarily in the subsequent separate principles. No doubt that the distinction between the immediate and mediate derivation from the essentia primi (bi-lā wāṣṭaḥ · bi-tawassut) comes from the Arabic Plotinus. As a matter of fact, the topic of the creation of Intellect bi-lā bi-tawassut and of everything else bi-tawassut al-aql counts as an interpretation of a doctrine which is at one and the same time crucial for Plotinus, and abandoned by later Neoplatonists like Proclus, i.e., the definition of Intellect as the ἀγωγός τοῦ πρώτου of the One and the doctrine of its immediate derivation from the One itself. The Arabic translation-paraphrase constantly interprets this relationship as the divine creation of Intellect without any intermediate, and creation of everything else through the mediation of Intellect. This recurrent topos of the Arabic Plotinus lies in the background of Ibn Sīnā’s development. However, he combines the doctrine of the Arabic Plotinus with the idea of a hierarchy of intelligibles, some of which are prior to others and more powerful than others, depending upon their immediate or mediate derivation from the First Principle. This topic does not come from the Arabic Plotinus, in so far as it traces back ultimately to the Proclean doctrine of the different rank of the intelligible forms according to the hierarchical degree of the divine intellects they are intelligized by. To be more precise, Ibn Sīnā’s claim recalls the doctrine of propositions 4 and 4[5] of the Liber de Causis.

After having endorsed—not without modifying it—Proclus’ thesis of the primacy of being among the suprasensible principles (EI. th. 138), the author of the Liber parts company with Proclus and makes Intellect to be the first and immediate product of the First Cause, a non-Proclean move indeed, which is inspired in all likelihood by the Arabic Plotinus. At this point, he comes back to the Elements of theology, but not to prop. 138, and no longer in terms of literal quotation. He takes in fact his inspiration either in prop. 177 (more likely) or in prop. 170, or again in prop. 180—the three main places where Proclus compares the status of ἐξωθή when considered in the superior and inferior intellects—and maintains that in the first created Intellect the intelligible forms are wider and more universal, whereas in the intellects of lower degree they are less universal. As a consequence of this difference in universality, the higher intellects produce stable and subsistent forms, whereas the inferior intellects produce declining
The derivation of Intellect from the First Principle bi-lā tawassut and of everything else through the mediation of Intellect is a typical doctrine of the Arabic Plotinus, which was endorsed, in turn, by the author of the Liber de Causis. Ibn Sīnā is clearly aware of this typical feature of the Arabic Plotinus, even though he transforms it and puts it in the service of his own reasoning about the status of the intelligibles within the divine mind: he is in fact dealing here with the intellecta as they are first in essentia primi and secondarily in the subsequent separate principles. No doubt that the distinction between the immediate and mediate derivation from the essentia primi (bi-lā wistīta - bi-tawassut) comes from the Arabic Plotinus. As a matter of fact, the topic of the creation of Intellect bi-lā tawassut and of everything else bi-tawassat al-aql counts as an interpretation of a doctrine which is at one and the same time crucial for Plotinus, and abandoned by later Neoplatonists like Proclus, i.e., the definition of Intellect as the έγκρατία του προτότοκον of the One and the doctrine of its immediate derivation from the One itself. The Arabic translation-paraphrase constantly interprets this relationship as the divine creation of Intellect without any intermediate, and creation of everything else through the mediation of Intellect. This recurrent topos of the Arabic Plotinus lies in the background of Ibn Sīnā's development. However, he combines the doctrine of the Arabic Plotinus with the idea of a hierarchy of intelligibles, some of which are prior to others and more powerful than others, depending upon their immediate or mediate derivation from the First Principle. This topic does not come from the Arabic Plotinus, so far as it traces back ultimately to the Proclean doctrine of the different rank of the intelligible forms according to the hierarchical degree of the divine intelligences they are intelligized by. To be more precise, Ibn Sīnā's claim recalls the doctrine of propositions 4 and 4[5] of the Liber de Causis.

After having endorsed—not without modifying it—Proclus' thesis of the primacy of being among the suprasensible principles (El. th. 138), the author of the Liber parts company with Proclus and makes Intellect to be the first and immediate product of the First Cause, a non-Proclean move indeed, which is inspired in all likelihood by the Arabic Plotinus. At this point, he comes back to the Elements of theology, but not to prop. 138, and no longer in terms of literal quotation. He takes in fact his inspiration either in prop. 177 (more likely) or in prop. 170, or again in prop. 180—the three main places where Proclus compares the status of the ένωσις when considered in the superior and inferior intelligences—and maintains that in the first created Intellect the intelligible forms are wider and more universal, whereas in the intelligences of lower degree they are less universal. As a consequence of this difference in universality, the higher intelligents produce stable and subsistent forms, whereas the inferior intelligents produce declining
forms, like souls: in fact, soul comes out ex impressione intelligentiae secundae quae sequitur esse creatum inferius.\textsuperscript{84}

When he claims that among the intelligibles some derive from the First Principle without any intermediation and some through a mediation, and that their “impression” in the intellectual substance which receives them creates a hierarchy (\textit{quaedam sunt prius et posterius secundum ordinem causae et causant}) Ibn\textsuperscript{57}Sin\textsuperscript{a} seems to be aware of both his Neoplatonic sources: the Arabic Plotinus as for the topic of immediacy-mediation with respect to the First Principle, and the \textit{Liber de Causis} as for the one of the hierarchy among intelligibles. Once again, Ibn\textsuperscript{57}Sin\textsuperscript{a}’s use of his sources is remarkably free both from the viewpoint of doctrine and lexic. From the viewpoint of doctrine, both the topic of derivation \textit{bi-là tawassut - bi-taws}\textsuperscript{58}\textit{as al-‘aql} and of the hierarchy among intelligibles are reworked according to his own ideas and needs. From the viewpoint of terminology, he endorses the idea of “impression”, not the term itself \textit{irtisām} in Ibn\textsuperscript{57}Sin\textsuperscript{a}’s passage, \textit{aṣar} in the \textit{Liber de Causis}.

Dimitri Gutas called attention to the fact that Ibn\textsuperscript{57}Sin\textsuperscript{a} «was born and raised in the Eastern parts of the Islamic Empire where Kind\textsuperscript{57}’s tradition was most flourishing (\ldots); he pursued his “graduate” studies in the very library in which ‘Āmilī most likely composed and probably deposited his \textit{On the Afterlife}.\textsuperscript{85} The latter treatise is precisely the work in which the earliest quotations from the \textit{Liber de Causis} are found.\textsuperscript{86} The passages analysed create a drift towards the conclusion that Ibn\textsuperscript{57}Sin\textsuperscript{a} was acquainted with the \textit{Liber de Causis}, a text which was by no means ignored in his cultural context.

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\textbf{LA TRANSMISION DE LA FILOSOFIA EN EL MEDIEVO CRISTIANO: EL PROLOGO DE AVENDEUTH}

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\textbf{RESUMEN}

El proyecto de traducir al latín el \textit{Shif\textsuperscript{51}}`\textacute{a} de Avicena es el resultado directo del interés de la cultura cristiana medieval por incorporar la herencia islámica más avanzada de aquel tiempo. Así lo pone de manifiesto el prólogo en el que Avendeuth dedica la traducción de el \textit{De anima} al Arzobispo de Toledo. En la transmisión medieval de la filosofía se concreta la significación que la transmisión del saber en general tiene para la historia de la filosofía del Occidente medieval como búsqueda de una cultura cristiana que pudiera estar de acuerdo con los progresos de la razón humana.

\textbf{Palabras clave}: Avendeuth, Traductores de Toledo, Avicena, Aristóteles.

\textbf{ABSTRACT}

The design of translating into Latin the Avicenna’s \textit{Shif\textsuperscript{51}}`\textacute{a} is the immediate consequence of the medieval Christian culture concern to include the most advanced islamic inheritance of the age. This is stated in the preface in which Avendeuth dedicates the \textit{De anima} translation to the Arzobishop of Toledo. Medieval transmission of philosophy specifies the significance that the transmission of the knowledge in general has for the history of the mediaeval West philosophy as a search for a Christian culture in accordance with the development of human reason.

\textbf{Key words}: Avendeuth, Toledo Translators, Avicena, Aristotle.

Aun en los tiempos en que la historiografía filosófica tomaba como indiscutible la periodización de la \textit{Historia crítica} de Brucker, en la que quedó establecido el mito de la «barbaria filosófica medieval», Gerberto de Aurillac fue siempre, por lo general, citado como una excepción o, como decía Buonafede en su \textit{Della historia e della indole di ogni filosofia} (1766-1781), como una de aquellas vetas de oro que merecía la pena rescatar del «fango escolástico». D’Alembert, incluso, en el \textit{Discours préliminaire} de 1751, veía en Gerberto un «hombre genial» al que la «ignorante, infeliz y tenebrosa» sociedad de su tiempo le impidió llevar a cabo una obra capaz de contribuir al retorno de la razón y del buen gusto».