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Arabic and Islamic Metaphysics

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Among the Greek philosophical disciplines transmitted to the Arabic and Islamic world, metaphysics was of paramount importance, as its pivotal role in the overall history of the transmission of Greek thought into Arabic culture makes evident. The beginnings of Arabic philosophy coincide with the production of the first extensive translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, within the circle of translators associated with the founder of *falsafa*, al-Kindī. The so-called “early” or “classical” phase of Arabic philosophy ends with the largest commentary on the *Metaphysics* available in Western philosophy, by Ibn Rushd (Averroes). The following “golden” age of this trend continues to be primarily concerned with metaphysics, turning from the effort of interpreting the intricacies of Aristotle's canonical text towards the process of assimilating the model of metaphysical science first outlined by al-Fārābī and then implemented by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna).

In the *incipit* of the *Metaphysics* according to the Arabic way of ordering the books of this work (book Alpha Elatton, chapter 1), Arabic philosophers could even find the justification of their Greek pedigree and their *raison d'être* in a predominantly religious society: philosophy is said there to be constitutively a “search” and to be directed towards a goal—truth—that surpasses human individual capacities both objectively, for its extremely wide scope, and subjectively, for the weakness of man's cognitive faculties, thus obliging its followers to join their efforts with all previous and present investigators of truth. This explains the large fortune of this proemium, and of the similitude accompanying it (the human intellect, with respect to the most knowable things, is like bats' eyes with respect to daylight), not only in philosophy, but also in theology and literature, to such an extent that its different versions can be taken as specimens of the various understandings of the nature and possibilities of *falsafa*, and of the degree of its dependence on Greek thought, in the history of Arabic philosophy.

This impression of centrality is confirmed by the number and variety of works pertaining to metaphysics written in Arabic—translations of the basic Greek texts, different kinds of commentaries on the translated material, original works with various degrees of comprehensiveness and doctrinal depth, etc.—all of which provide clear evidence of the intellectual vivacity and the productive energy of this philosophical area. Such an intensive reflection on metaphysics leads to what represents the specific Arabic contribution to the history of this discipline, namely the progressive devising of a new standard of metaphysics, in which this discipline assumes the form of a comprehensive and articulated synthesis of the Greek heritage, undergoes a process of epistemological refinement—in terms of delimitation of scope, coherence of structure, rigorousness of arguments, etc.—and ascends to the role of cornerstone of philosophy. This process brings forth a real “second beginning” of metaphysics in the history of philosophy, whose model eventually prevailed in the Arabic philosophical milieu, despite occasional criticisms motivated by an anachronistic desire to defend the Greek legacy in its uncontaminated form. Non-philosophical forms of knowledge—above all revealed theology—also had to confront the challenge posed by metaphysics. The vigorous and long-lasting impact of this metaphysical paradigm in non-Arabic and non-Muslim cultural areas, like the Latin-Christian and the Hebrew-Jewish, attests to its great doctrinal and epistemological attractiveness.

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1. The Fundamental Texts, the Approaches, the Issues

The above considerations show that the fate of metaphysics as a branch of philosophy in the Arabic speaking world and in Muslim societies coincides, by and large, with the reception and transformation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. The anti-Aristotelian tendencies of the early phase of Arabic philosophy, marked by the adoption of a decidedly Platonic stance in metaphysics and the consequent rejection of Aristotle’s teaching, evident in the views of Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyā’ al-Rāzī (d. ca. 925), remained a local and short-lived phenomenon. In mainstream Arabic philosophy, the *Metaphysics* represented for centuries the centerpiece of the corresponding discipline. Aristotle’s work is the prime, and very often the only, Greek work mentioned in connection with metaphysics in the the classifications of the sciences devised in *falsafa*. No other Greek metaphysical work was translated and commented upon in the same continuous, widespread, and multiform manner, or quoted so often and extensively used. The variety of titles which Aristotle’s work received in the Arabic tradition, by means of transliterations of the Greek title, translations of it, and more original denominations (like “Book of Letters”), and the corresponding multifarious ways of referring to the science contained therein, are clear sign of the far-reaching and impactful dissemination of the *Metaphysics* in Arabic. Other vehicles of Greek metaphysical thought, like the *Theologia Aristotelis*, whose aim was to make Aristotle’s work compatible with Islamic creationism by means of the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation, stress from the outset the primacy of the *Metaphysics* as the fundamental text of metaphysics, and fictively portray Aristotle as the author of the adaptation of the Plotinian material by means of which the desired completion of the *Metaphysics* is performed. If the *Metaphysics*—as well as the entire Aristotelian *corpus*—underwent a gradual eclipse in post-Avicennian Arabic philosophy, this was not due to a decline of its prestige, but to the success of Avicenna’s incorporation of the text and the doctrine of Aristotle’s work in his new encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences, *The Cure or Healing (Al-Šifā’)* where he constantly stresses his reliance on the teaching of the “First Master” (Aristotle) and his disciples.

Schematically, Arabic authors adopted three main ways of approaching the text of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, corresponding to three different literary genres. The first approach, which can be called “taxonomical”, is found in classificatory essays whose goal is to outline the content of the *Metaphysics* and to clarify its place in the Aristotelian *corpus*, as well as to indicate the position of the discipline of metaphysics in the system of knowledge. The “exegetical” approach is represented by commentaries that aim at explaining, with different degrees of literalness and comprehensiveness, the content of the *Metaphysics*. The tendency to adaptation, finally, is visible in metaphysical treatises that reformulate the doctrine of Aristotle’s work and are intended as original elaborations, regardless of the degree of dependence on their Greek model. All main Arabic metaphysicians approached the *Metaphysics* from at least one of these various perspectives.

From the doctrinal point of view, Arabic interpreters of the *Metaphysics* debated three basic theoretical issues. First of all, they reflected on the scientific configuration of the discipline presented by Aristotle's work, with special focus on fundamental aspects such as its subject-matter (namely the issue of whether metaphysics is a philosophical theology, or an ontology, or both), structure, method, and position in the system of knowledge. This consideration of the epistemic status of metaphysics took into account an enlarged Aristotelian *corpus*, which included within theoretical philosophy a mathematics based on Euclid and Ptolemy (since Aristotle himself wrote no treatise on mathematics), and complemented the *Metaphysics* with pseudo-Aristotelian Neoplatonic metaphysical works (the Plotinian *Theologia Aristotelis* and the Proclean *Liber de causis*). The second concern is the investigation of specific doctrines related to the distinct issues dealt with in the *Metaphysics*. The prominent topics within the study of being *qua* being, or ontology, are the various aspects of the theory of essence, like the clarification of its relationship with form and substance, the discussion of the epistemological and ontological status of universals, etc. Conversely, the debate about the eternity vs. the origination of the world, and the mode of the universe's production by the First Principle, whether by way of emanation from Its own essence or creation *ex nihilo*, is of central importance in philosophical theology; likewise, the features that Aristotle ascribes to the divine Unmoved Mover, with particular regard to Its unity, necessity and intellectual nature, provide the starting-points for far-reaching developments. The third concern is the discussion of the relationship of the philosophical theology contained in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* with Islam, namely the assessment of the degree of compatibility between the rational conception of the divinity upheld by Greek philosophy, on the one hand, and the image of God conveyed by Islamic prophetic revelation, on the other. The assumption of the oneness of truth, common among Arabic philosophers, allows metaphysics to provide a rational and coherent account of the same divine realm disclosed by revelation, thereby putting it in competition with Islamic theology. The results of these three doctrinal concerns are interconnected, since a certain view of metaphysics as a science, and a certain stand on specific doctrinal points, can enhance or reduce the affinity of metaphysics with Islamic religion and the possibility of its integration into Muslim culture. A conception of metaphysics that limits its scope to philosophical theology and minimizes the relevance of ontological concerns is particularly apt to underscore its compatibility with Islam. By contrast, a view of metaphysics in which the ontological dimension plays a role as prominent as the one assigned to philosophical theology, and in which the First Principle's properties are discordant, rather than congruent, with the Islamic divine attributes, goes in the opposite direction.

The different textual approaches and theoretical solutions to the aforementioned problems are assumed here as guidelines for the articulation of the history of the Arabic reception of the *Metaphysics*. On this basis, seven main chronological periods can be roughly distinguished: the first five phases culminate in the sixth, i.e., in Avicenna, who emerges as the turning point of the history of Arabic metaphysics.

2. The Arabic Translations of the *Metaphysics*

The translation activity regarding the *Metaphysics* continued uninterruptedly for three centuries (the ninth to the eleventh), with the production of several Arabic versions of Aristotle's text, some of which might have depended on Syriac intermediaries, and the involvement of a number of different translators, belonging to the main schools of Arabic philosophy. These translations display different degrees of inclusiveness (from integral versions of Aristotle's work to translations of its single books) and literalness (from strict word for word procedures to styles more akin to paraphrase). Cumulatively, the Arabic translations of the *Metaphysics* evidence the intention of making the entire text of Aristotle's work accessible to Arabic readers, extending the translation activity from the first translated main bulk of the work (books Alpha Elatton-Mu, II–XIII) towards more peripheral books, like Alpha Meizon (I) and Nu (XIV). Equally clear is the effort to provide an Arabic version which, while remaining faithful to the Greek original, could be more respondent to philosophical clarity, with a special focus on the repeatedly translated book Lambda (XII). Also remarkable is

the translation of the main available Greek commentaries on the *Metaphysics*, namely those of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius (less certain is the case of Syrianus' commentary), whose explanations of book Lambda (and, in the case of Syrianus, Beta (III)) were translated together with the corresponding books of Aristotle's work. Since other Greek works intimately related to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* were also translated into Arabic—like Theophrastus's *On First Principles*, the metaphysical section of Nicholas of Damascus's *On the Philosophy of Aristotle*, Alexander of Aphrodisias's *On the Principles of the Universe*, the *De aeternitate mundi contra Aristotelem* and other cosmological writings of Philoponus—the entire Greek exegetical tradition of the *Metaphysics*, from Aristotle's first disciples (Theophrastus) to his last interpreters/reformers (Philoponus), was available to Arabic-speaking scholars.

On account of its long duration, the high rank of the scholars it engaged, and the number of translations produced, this area of the overall translation movement from Greek into Arabic should not be reduced to a mere preliminary phase of the Arabic reception of the *Metaphysics*, but rather provides a specimen of the main trends that characterized the first centuries of its history.

3. Al-Kindī and His School

Al-Kindī (d. after 870) engaged in a taxonomic approach to Aristotle's *corpus*, on the basis of a number of unidentified Greek sources of Neoplatonic heritage (*Treatise on the Quantity of Aristotle's Books and What is Required to Attain Philosophy*, *Risāla fī kammiyyat kutub Aristātālīs wa-mā yuḥtaḡu ilayhi fī taḥṣīl al-falsafa*). In this treatise, he expresses an ambivalent view of the place of the *Metaphysics* in the *corpus*, by presenting Aristotle's work as the culmination of a four-fold division of philosophy into mathematics, logic, physics, and metaphysics, but also as preliminary to the knowledge of ethics. The description of the content of the *Metaphysics* is limited to the part of this work dealing with philosophical theology (the study of immaterial things), and contains explicit references to Islamic tenets such as God's oneness, the divine names, and providence.

Due to the loss of what might have been a specific commentary on the *Metaphysics* (attested under the title of *Inclusive Philosophy*, *Falsafa dāḥila*), the exegetical tendencies of al-Kindī can only be guessed. His extant works on metaphysics indicate the adoption of the paraphrase as explanatory technique, and a special attention to book Alpha Elatton (II)—the first book of the *Metaphysics* in the Arabic tradition—intended as introductory to the theological themes of book Lambda.

Al-Kindī's main metaphysical treatise (*Book on First Philosophy*, *Kitāb fī l-falsafa al-ūlā*, only partially extant) displays monotheistic concerns (the insistence on God's unity, with recourse to a model of the God-world relationship reminiscent of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of *Theologia Aristotelis* and *Liber de causis*), and the adoption of the doctrine of the creation of the universe in time (derived from Philoponus). The explicit encomiastic references to Aristotle occurring at the beginning of the work (with extensive paraphrastic excerpts of *Metaphysics* Alpha Elatton) and the abrupt switch to the themes of Book Lambda (albeit treated in an un-Aristotelian vein) confirm that the one-sided theologizing approach to the *Metaphysics* is directed at showing the compatibility of Greek metaphysics with Islamic religion. Thus, al-Kindī often portrays philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular, as the discipline deputed to give full articulation and rational explanation to the miraculous conciseness of the prophetic message (besides the central section of *On the Quantity of Aristotle's Books*, see also the *Epistle on the Explanation of the Prostration of the Extreme Body and its Obedience to God*, *Risāla fī l-Ibāna 'an suḡūd al-ḡirm al-aqsā wa-ṭā'atihī li-llāhi*).

The view of metaphysics as essentially a science of the divine being, rather than of being in general, and the intent of underscoring its affinity, once assimilated with philosophical theology, with Islam, was also

characteristic of al-Kindī's direct disciples and the "school" of authors inspired by his teaching or dependent on his same sources. This is evident both in classifications of the sciences (Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, d. 912; Ibn Farīḡūn, 10th century, the *Rasā'il* of the Iḥwān al-Ṣafā', written around 961–986; Miskawayh, d. 1030), and in independent treatises related to metaphysics (see Abū Sulaymān al-Manṭiqī al-Siġistānī, d. ca. 985, and his school; Abū l-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-ʿĀmirī, d. 992; Miskawayh).

4. Ṭābit ibn Qurra

According to historical sources, Ṭābit ibn Qurra (d. 901) might have revised the translation into Arabic of Themistius' paraphrase of *Metaphysics* Lambda. More importantly, this author wrote the first known extant Arabic commentary on the *Metaphysics*, still glossed by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) four centuries later, according to the method of concise exposition (*talḥīṣ*), i.e., isolating the most relevant points of the commented text. This commentary shares with al-Kindī's works a special regard for philosophical theology within metaphysics, since it focuses on book Lambda of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Also Kindian is the effort to accommodate Islamic monotheism, by insisting on the oneness and willful action of God, and by adopting the Porphyrian theme of the harmony between Aristotle's and Plato's teaching. At variance with al-Kindī, by contrast, is Ṭābit's endorsing of the doctrine of the eternity of the world, rather than its creation in time, against Philoponus, and the minimal reliance on Neoplatonic writings. The background of the commentary is decidedly Aristotelian, with some possible influence of the Peripatetic commentators (most notably Themistius, who however is never mentioned); nonetheless, Ṭābit revises some crucial tenets of Aristotle's philosophical theology, by understanding, for example, the First Mover as the first cause not only of the motion of the universe, but also of its existence.

5. Al-Fārābī

Besides more traditional overviews of the works of Aristotle and the place of the *Metaphysics* among them (*What Ought to be Premised to the Learning of Aristotle's Philosophy*, *Mā yanbaġ an yuqaddama qabla ta'allum falsafat Ariṣṭū; Aristotle's Philosophy and Its Parts*, *Falsafat Ariṣṭū'ālīs wa-aġzā' falsafatihī*), al-Fārābī (d. 950) also provided taxonomic accounts in which the *Metaphysics* is related to the system of the philosophical and Islamic sciences, rather than to the Aristotelian *corpus* of writings. In the most important and influential essay of this type, the *Enumeration of the Sciences* (*Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*), he portrays metaphysics as a discipline having a precise method (demonstration) and an articulated structure, in which a full-fledged ontology (the study of being *qua* being) in its different aspects precedes, first, a part dealing with the foundation of the other sciences and, second, a philosophical theology concerned, among other things, with Islamic issues such as God's attributes, and divine names and actions. In all these classificatory treatises, the position of the *Metaphysics* with respect to the other works of Aristotle, or of metaphysics with respect to the other philosophical disciplines, is not stable, but varies according to the particular perspective that al-Fārābī adopts: significantly, in some of them metaphysics is presented as the culmination of the entire system of knowledge, for example, in *The Philosophy of Aristotle*.

The consideration of the entire *Metaphysics*, and the view of metaphysics as universal science, are the pivotal elements of the short introduction to the *Metaphysics* written by al-Fārābī, following the model of the Prolegomena of Greek Late Antiquity and the teaching of Ammonius Son of Hermeias and his Aristotelian school in Alexandria. This essay, *On the Goals of the Sage [= Aristotle] in Each Treatise of the Book Labelled by Means of Letters [= Metaphysics]* (*Maqāla ... fī Aġrāḍ al-ḥakīm fī kull maqāla min al-kitāb al-mawsūm bi-l-ḥurūf*), represents the first integral exegesis of the *Metaphysics* extant in Arabic and reveals al-Fārābī's dependence on the epistemology of the newly translated *Posterior Analytics*. Fārābī's use of a style of exegesis stemming from the Peripatetic tradition is evidence of his closeness to the coeval school of

Baghdad Aristotelians. The main point of the work is that metaphysics is more encompassing than, and not reducible to, the philosophical theology of book Lambda. Accordingly, al-Fārābī first rejects the attempts to interpret Aristotle’s work along Neoplatonic and monotheistic lines (in this he has probably in mind al-Kindī’s theologizing conception of metaphysics), and advocates a type of explanation akin to that of the Greek commentators (Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius). Then he derives from the universal nature of metaphysics, understood as the science having being *qua* being as its subject-matter, indications regarding its scope (it incorporates a part on philosophical theology, namely on the doctrine of the first causes of being), as well as its oneness (there cannot be more than one universal science), its name (by being more general than physics it is also “after” physics) and its overall content. Finally, he concludes the work with a brief description of each of the books of Aristotle’s work known to him, in which the content of book Lambda is summarized with no religious overtones. In this way, al-Fārābī extracts from Aristotle’s work a coherent and all-encompassing outline of an “ideal” science of metaphysics; this project will guide the following generations of Arabic metaphysicians, in particular Avicenna, to build a new science of metaphysics according to Farabian parameters.

In al-Fārābī’s main works on political philosophy, philosophical theology is the only part of metaphysics that functions as preliminary—together with human noetics, man’s destiny in the afterlife, and prophecy—to the account of the organization of the ideal state (*Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City*, *Mabādi’ Ārā’ Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*). Other works of his, on the other hand, deal specifically with ontological themes. Among them, the *Book of Letters* (*Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, which is not, properly speaking, a commentary on the *Metaphysics*, despite the title echoing one of the Arabic names of Aristotle’s work) follows a pattern analogous to that of Book Delta (V) of the *Metaphysics*; the treatise *On One and Unity* (*Fī l-wāḥid wa-l-waḥda*) is thematically linked to Book Iota (X); the refutation of Philoponus’ criticism of Aristotle is a reassessment of the thesis of the eternity of the world. Scattered references to the *Metaphysics*, with regard to distinct topics, surface also in the *Book on the Agreement of the Opinions of the Two Sages, the Divine Plato and Aristotle* (*Kitāb al-Ġam’ bayna ra’yay al-ḥakīmayn Aflāṭūn al-ilāhī wa-Aristūṭālīs*), a work revolving around the Porphyrian theme of the harmony between Aristotle’s and Plato’s views. This motive had been taken up by al-Kindī and Ṭābit ibn Qurra, but seems alien to Fārābī’s conception of the history of philosophy. For this and other reasons, the Farabian authorship of this treatise, despite the manuscript evidence, has been repeatedly questioned in recent scholarship.

The view that metaphysics is the universal science of being *qua* being, and thus exceeds the boundaries of philosophical theology by including it as one of its parts, functions in al-Fārābī to underscore the irreducibility of metaphysics to Islamic religion: at the level of content, metaphysics ranges over a thematic spectrum wider than the Muslim creed; on epistemic grounds, the demonstrative method of metaphysics (and of philosophy in general) is superior not only to the rhetorical and poetical character of prophetic discourse, but also to the dialectical procedures of Islamic theology (*kalām*). This helps to explain why al-Fārābī does not indulge in the philosophical explanation of the *Qur’ān*, and why in the political works does he treat topics pertinent to religion from a strictly philosophical point of view, with no concession to religious terminology or theological preoccupations.

6. The Baghdad Aristotelians

The *Metaphysics* held an undisputable importance for the school of Christian Aristotelians that flourished in Baghdad during the X–XI centuries, who took over from the Aristotelian scholars of Alexandria the project of providing a systematic commentary on Aristotle’s works. Many members of this school—starting from its founder, Abū Biṣr Mattā ibn Yūnus (d. 940), through to its later leader, Abū Zakariyā’ Yaḥyā ibn ‘Adī (d. 974), and to one of its last representatives, ‘Īsā ibn Zur‘a (d. 1008)—contributed decisively to the translation of the *Metaphysics* into Arabic. Moreover, some of these authors are credited with the translation into Arabic

of parts of the main Greek commentaries on the *Metaphysics* (Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius on book Lambda, by Abū Bišr Mattā), or they were reported to be familiar with the Arabic translation of further Greek commentaries on Aristotle's work, as well as with treatises on metaphysics by some of Aristotle's immediate disciples (for example, Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī was said to be familiar with the commentary on book Beta by Syrianus and the original treatise on metaphysics by Theophrastus of Eresus). Finally, numerous literal commentaries on the *Metaphysics*, following in the footsteps of Alexander of Aphrodisias' exegetical style, were produced within this school. Thus, later sources inform us that Abū Bišr Mattā commented on books Alpha Elatton, Beta (III) and Theta (VIII) of the *Metaphysics*; he is also quoted in Avicenna's exegesis of book Lambda in the extant fragments of the *Book of the Fair Judgement*. Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's commentary on book Alpha Elatton is extant. Abū l-Faraġ ibn al-Ṭayyib's (d. 1043) commentary on the *Metaphysics*, preserved in fragments in Hebrew translation, is famous for its length and its attention to every detail, an exegetical style decidedly resented by Avicenna.

Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī is the Aristotelian of Baghdad whose metaphysical orientations are best known, within a corpus of writings whose boundaries are progressively widened by scholarship. The literal style of exegesis he deploys in commenting on *Metaphysics* Alpha Elatton does not prevent him from introducing religious concerns into this commentary. The broadly speaking "Platonic" theories of some of his treatises devoted to ontological issues, like the postulation of divine forms within the discussion of the mode of existence of universals, can be seen as Platonizing solutions to Aristotelian problems, rather than as indications of affiliation to non-Aristotelian philosophical traditions.

7. Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)

Outlines of metaphysics, of various lengths, can be found in Avicenna's treatises on the classifications of the sciences, as well as in the surveys of the different branches of philosophy interspersed in many of his other works. These epistemological sketches are substantiated in his *summae*, a literary genre of which he can be considered the inventor. In all these "encyclopedias" of philosophy—addressed to different audiences and displaying various formats, methodologies, and styles—metaphysics constitutes, together with logic and natural philosophy, a permanent and pivotal part of philosophy. In those written in Arabic, after the propaedeutic treatment of logic, the sequence of theoretical disciplines is given—along traditional lines—as natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics, or simply as natural philosophy and metaphysics, with mathematics frequently omitted. By contrast, in the Persian *summa*, *Philosophy for 'Alā' al-Dawla* (*Dānišnāmah-yi 'Alā'ī*), and possibly also in the incompletely extant *The Easterners* (*Al-Mašriqiyyūn*) or *Eastern Philosophy* (*Al-Ḥikma al-mašriqiyya*), the order is reversed and, as Avicenna himself avows, much more original: metaphysics constitutes the beginning, rather than the end, of theoretical philosophy. These two opposite arrangements are in fact compatible and underscore complementary aspects of the primacy of metaphysics within theoretical philosophy: metaphysics is last in the order of learning as the pinnacle of philosophical instruction, while it is first in the order of reality on account of the supreme rank of the things it deals with.

In Avicenna's literal commentaries on the philosophical *corpus*, most of which are lost, metaphysics represents the section about which we are best informed by either Avicenna himself or his disciples (e.g., *The Available and the Valid*, *Al-Ḥāṣil wa-l-maḥṣūl*), or by the surviving portions (e.g., *Book of the Fair Judgment*, *Kitāb al-Inṣāf*). Judging from the extant fragments, conciseness and selectiveness appear to have been the stylistic and methodological hallmarks of Avicenna's exegesis of the *Metaphysics*.

Avicenna's unprecedented account of the *Metaphysics* can be best appreciated in the metaphysical sections of his *summae* of philosophy, which sum up the approaches to Aristotle's work deployed by previous interpreters, namely the taxonomical reflection on the place of metaphysics in the architecture of knowledge,

the exegetical effort of explaining the *Metaphysics*' text, and the intent of updating and upgrading Aristotle's metaphysical model (see [section 1](#)). On the one hand, in so far as they are collections of the different branches of philosophy, and expound metaphysics together with logic, natural philosophy, and mathematics, these works give metaphysics a precise position in the system of the philosophical disciplines. On the other hand, they provide an explanation of Aristotle's text by incorporating it into Avicenna's own discourse by means of a report which modifies the formulation of the original text and changes the arrangement of its parts. More importantly, they adapt the scientific profile and the specific content of the *Metaphysics* to new epistemological requirements, to the doctrinal progress of post-Aristotelian philosophy, and to the Islamic setting with which metaphysics is now called to interact. Specifically, they adjust the tentative scientific configuration assigned to *Metaphysics* by Aristotle himself to higher epistemological standards; they refine the doctrine of the *Metaphysics* and mold it with theories taken from other authors and works within the Aristotelian tradition, or from the fruits of Avicenna's own mind; and they make the final treatment of philosophical theology in metaphysics compliant with religious concerns and the theological agenda of the Islamic milieu in which Avicenna's *summae* are produced.

Among Avicenna's *summae*, the most extensive, influential, and, by the author's own admission, the most dependent upon Aristotelian sources is the *Book of the Cure/Healing* (*Kitāb al-Šifā'*). The "traditional" character of the work, far from preventing originality, allows the reader to observe more keenly the author's subtle and wide-ranging adaptation of the Aristotelian model and his free disposal of the received material. This applies to metaphysics in an eminent way. The metaphysical section of the *Cure/Healing*, *The Science of Divine Things* (*Ilāhiyyāt*), comes at the end of a massive work consisting in a collection of twenty-two volumes, which is unique among Avicenna's *summae* not only with regard to length (more than 5000 pages in the current printing of the Arabic text, one of the longest works ever written in the history of philosophy) and dissemination (the present census of manuscripts surpasses 300) but also because it is the only *summa* that contains both a full-fledged part on mathematics before metaphysics, and a summary treatment of practical philosophy (politics, economics, and ethics) as an appendix to metaphysics. In this way, only in *The Science of Divine Things*, does metaphysics figure as a real cornerstone of the entire philosophical curriculum, both with respect to what precedes (logic and the other two parts of theoretical philosophy) and with respect to what follows (practical philosophy). More than one recension of the work turns out to have existed, and Avicenna's circle of disciples and cooperators probably took part in framing the version of the text most widely transmitted.

As to the text of the *Metaphysics*, in *The Science of Divine Things* Avicenna uses several Arabic translations of Aristotle's work, and adopts various techniques for quoting it: his way of referring to the *Metaphysics* is usually very selective in content and free in style, although in a few cases his quotations become continuous and resemble a real paraphrase. This latter case happens with *Metaphysics* α , 2, which Avicenna cites in its entirety, with explicative expansions, in the eighth treatise of the work, introducing into the paraphrase frequent references to the *Metaphysics* ("First Teaching") and its author ("First Teacher"), as well as an explicit mention of book Alpha Elatton itself, and defending the doctrines at stake by offering solutions to a series of possible objections. Within the ninth treatise, the same special treatment is given, to a lesser degree, to *Metaph.* Λ , 6–10. These excerpts of Aristotle's text might be fragments of Avicenna's own previous exegetical works.

The liberty with which Avicenna reports the text of the *Metaphysics* is paramount to his effort of adapting it to a new context. With respect to Aristoteles' work, *The Science of Divine Things* exhibits three radical aspects of modification. Avicenna changes, first of all, the "form", i.e., the scientific profile, of Aristotle's work. Accordingly, he also modifies its "content", namely the disposition and doctrinal purport of the individual treatises of the work. These two modifications are concomitant with a third, more general, change, regarding the position and role of the science of metaphysics in the system of the sciences. The change regarding the "form" affects all the fundamental aspects of a science singled out by Aristotle in the *Posterior*

Analytics: the theme of metaphysics, its structure, and its method. The content of the *Metaphysics*, on the other hand, is reworked by means of a different arrangement of its parts, the integration of Aristotle's thought with subsequent metaphysical speculation, both Greek and Arabic, the introduction of some original key doctrines, and a treatment of the divine realm very attentive to the concerns of Islamic religion and theology. The change regarding the systemic function of metaphysics, finally, involves a precise view of its relationship with the other sciences as both foundational and crowning discipline, thus overcoming Aristotle's veto in the *Posterior Analytics* on the subalternation under a single science of all other disciplines. Cumulatively, in these three ways Avicenna performs a thorough and radical revision of the authoritative text on metaphysics, which can be rightly regarded as a sort of second "edition" of the *Metaphysics*, in a dialectical relationship of both continuity and innovation with respect to Aristotle's teaching.

In the context of the epistemological reshaping of the metaphysics, Avicenna shows first that the subject-matter of this science conforms to all the different characteristics that Aristotle assigns to it in the *Metaphysics*. Thus, metaphysics is a study of the First Causes and God (cf. *Metaph.* A, 1, 981b28–29; A, 2, 982b9–10), since the First Causes and God are its "goal". But it is also a study of "the existent" (cf. *Metaph.* Γ, 1, 1003a20–26), since "the existent *qua* existent" is its subject-matter. Finally, metaphysics is a study of immaterial and unmoved things (cf. *Metaph.* E, 1, 1026a13–23), since both the First Causes and God, and "the existent *qua* existent" are realities of this kind. This harmonization of Aristotle's different points of view aims at conforming metaphysics to the epistemological canons of the *Posterior Analytics*. Avicenna is the first thinker in the history of philosophy to have devoted a distinct and articulated treatment to the issue of the subject-matter of metaphysics, along the *Posterior Analytics*' insistence on the subject-matter as the fundamental element of every science. The later impact of Avicenna's treatment of this topic on Arabic and Latin philosophy has been enormous, insofar as it settled the issue of how metaphysics can be both an ontology and a philosophical theology. The other aspects of the scientific reform of metaphysics introduced by Avicenna are also the result of applying the epistemological requirements of the *Posterior Analytics* to this discipline. In this way, Avicenna bestows on metaphysics an articulated and coherent structure, based on the main elements that the *Posterior Analytics* spell out as fundamental to every science: the parts, properties, and principles of its subject-matter, and a method that is, as much as possible, demonstrative, in keeping with the *Posterior Analytics*' claim that demonstration is the most perfect type of proof.

As to the recasting of the content of the *Metaphysics*, Avicenna quotes all the fourteen books into which the *Metaphysics* is traditionally divided (apart, perhaps, from book K), but according to an order that is strikingly different from that of Aristotle's work. This modification allows the integration of themes taken from other sources, either from other Aristotelian writings, or from the Greek and Arabic Peripatetic tradition in which Aristotle's *Metaphysics* was commented, elaborated, and expanded, or from Avicenna's own cultural context. In this last respect, the philosophical theology of *The Science of Divine Things* includes a series of themes familiar to Avicenna's Muslim audience (the existence of God, His attributes, providence, theodicy, the human soul's destiny in the afterlife, prophecy etc.), which are treated on a strictly philosophical basis, but with occasional recourse to examples, terminology, and scriptural quotations of Islamic provenance, used to confirm the rational conclusions reached. This, together with the theological views debated throughout the work, indicates Avicenna's intention to show that the philosophical world-view expressed in metaphysics is not contrary or alien to the Islamic one, and that it can provide rational access to some of the tenets of the Muslim creed. *The Science of Divine Things*, however, is not the mere sum of its many sources. Some of the original doctrines that Avicenna introduces within the framework of metaphysics run through the work and serve to connect and unify its various themes. Most notorious among them are the distinction between essence and existence in created beings, which is the theoretical leitmotif of the work, and the metaphysical proof of God's existence, grounded in Avicenna's view of the subject-matter of metaphysics and of causation, and representing the pivotal element of the section on philosophical theology. The distinction between essence and existence underlies many themes of Avicenna's metaphysics: it justifies, for instance, the difference between the primary concepts "thing" (i.e., "that which has an essence") and "existent" at the

beginning of the work; it grounds the theory of universals (universality is an attribute that belongs to an essence not as such, but when this latter exists in the human mind, abstracted from the extra-mental things in which it is instantiated); and it leads to the fundamental characterization of God as the only being that has no essence apart from existence, or whose essence is totally identical to its existence. Equally important in *The Science of Divine Things* is the proof of God's existence, which is announced at the beginning of the work (I.6) and given towards its end (VIII.1–3). It involves a precise view of the relationship between metaphysics and natural philosophy, in as much as it is a properly metaphysical argument, independent from the conclusions reached in physics; it turns out to be original with regard to the other metaphysical writings of Avicenna, because it is based not only on a precise doctrine of the *Metaphysics* (the finiteness of causal chains in *Metaph. α, 2*), but also on the text itself of this chapter of Aristotle's work, as we have seen.

As to the role of metaphysics among the sciences, *The Science of Divine Things* grants this discipline a position of eminence with respect to all other branches of philosophy. The series of parts constituting the *Šifā'* amounts to a concrete classification of the sciences: in it, metaphysics functions as the “queen of the sciences” that ascertains the principles taken for granted by all the other sciences, and interconnects and orders hierarchically the system. Metaphysics is foundational insofar as it is the universal science of the existent *qua* existent (ontology). The scientific principles assessed by metaphysics are, on the one hand, the logical laws common to all the sciences (the axioms), and the universal concepts that every science uses without examining them (the primary concepts like “existent”, “thing”, “necessary”, “one”). On the other hand, metaphysics clarifies the principles that are proper to each of the particular sciences, i.e., their specific assumptions or hypotheses. Thus, metaphysics proves the very existence and the mode of existence of the subject-matters of the other theoretical sciences (for example, the existence of universals and categories in logic, of matter and form in natural philosophy, and of discrete and continuous quantity in mathematics). In as much as it clarifies the existential underpinnings of the phenomenon of prophecy, after the functional presentation of prophecy provided in psychology, metaphysics turns out to be foundational also with respect to the ensuing practical philosophy (X.4–5), of which the doctrine of prophecy represents the leitmotif.

In Avicenna, all the previous trends of the Arabic tradition of the *Metaphysics* converge and find their synthesis. This is particularly manifest in the philosophical theology that invariably concludes his accounts of metaphysics in the *summae* and that finds its most lucid expression in *The Science of Divine Things*. In this section, on the one hand Avicenna reiterates the connection between *Metaph. α, 2* and Λ, 6–10 that was typical of al-Kindī's selective way of approaching the *Metaphysics*; on the other hand, he incorporates procedures of explanation *ad litteram* and by way of questions (*per modum quaestionis*) of Aristotle's text (with particular regard to *Metaph. α, 2*) that are reminiscent of the Baghdad Aristotelians' exegetical method; in a third respect, he discusses a sequence of themes that mirrors the structure of the theological philosophy of al-Fārābī's political treatises. The Aristotelian core of this section is expanded by means of accretions taken from Alexander of Aphrodisias' and Themistius' works on metaphysics (the Aristotelian commentators mentioned by al-Fārābī and translated into Arabic by the Baghdad Aristotelians), and from the pseudo-Aristotelian, Neoplatonic works that were commonly appended to the *Metaphysics* in Arabic philosophy, i.e., the Plotinian *Theologia Aristotelis* and the Proclean *Liber de Causis*, produced within al-Kindī's circle. As a result, Avicenna's metaphysics harmonizes al-Kindī's emphasis on the theological component of the *Metaphysics* with al-Fārābī's vindication of the foundational role of ontology; by the same token, he reconciles al-Fārābī's view of metaphysics as a science modeled on the epistemology of the *Posterior Analytics* with the Baghdad Aristotelians' project of a global explanation of Aristotle's text. In this way, the congruence of metaphysics with Islamic theology is not realized in a “Kindian” way, i.e., by limiting the scope of this discipline to a part of the *Metaphysics*, but depends, in a more “Farabian” vein, upon the entire work of Aristotle once its inner structure and its goal has been properly underscored.

The other metaphysical *summae* by Avicenna single out and emphasize particular aspects of the overarching architecture of metaphysics displayed in *The Science of Divine Things*. Thus, *The Book of Pointers and*

Reminders (Kitāb al-Iṣārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt) underscores the importance of philosophical theology within metaphysics by expanding it with respect to a much thinner ontology; the Persian *The Book of Science for 'Alā'-al-Dawla (Dānešnāme-ye 'Alā'ī)* places metaphysics as the first theoretical discipline (before natural philosophy and mathematics), after the preliminary logic, in order to signal its priority in the system of the sciences; the lost metaphysics of *The Easterners (Al-Mašriqiyyūn)* or *The Eastern Philosophy (Al-Ḥikma al-mašriqiyya)* might have formalized the divide between ontology and philosophical theology within metaphysics by splitting metaphysics into two distinct sciences corresponding to these two parts. The metaphysics of *The Book of Salvation (Kitāb al-Nağāt)*, finally, though structurally similar to *The Science of Divine Things*, differs from it in specific points and formulations (most notably, in how the proof of God's existence is structured), in so far as it incorporates doctrines from Avicenna's previous metaphysical works.

Besides the overall treatment of metaphysics in the *summae*, Avicenna investigates particular metaphysical areas in specific treatises, such as the *Book of Provenance and Destination (Kitāb al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād)*, which focuses, within metaphysics, on philosophical theology, or the *Epistle of Immolation about Destination (Al-Risāla al-adḥawiyya fī amr al-ma'ād)*, which concentrates on a specific topic of philosophical theology, i.e. the return of the human soul after death, separated from the body, to its place of origin, or in allegorical writings, such as the *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān* or the *Epistle of the Bird (Risālat al-Ṭayr)*. Various issues pertaining to metaphysics are extensively debated in works that contain Avicenna's reflections on key philosophical themes, such as the *Notes (Ta'liqāt)*, or that derive from the teaching activity and the dialectical practices performed within his circle, i.e., the *Discussions (Mubāḥaṭāt)*. Related to metaphysics are the specific essays ascribed to Avicenna and devoted to the philosophical and allegorical interpretation of some Qur'anic verses, whose authenticity however remains to be assessed.

8. Post-Avicennian Period

The three approaches to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* considered here (classification, commentary, adaptation), as well as the main schools of thought of the formative period (the Kindian, on the one hand, and the Farabian-Baghdadian, on the other), ended or began to wither with the rise of Avicenna's metaphysics. Although the text of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* continued to circulate in Arabic after the eleventh century, the metaphysical works of Avicenna gradually superseded the *Metaphysics* as the text to be copied, commented upon, and evaluated (either favorably or critically). Accordingly, in the post-Avicennian metaphysical tradition issues specifically regarding Avicenna's metaphysics are debated, like the status of essence and existence and the primacy of the one over the other, or whether a philosophical theology modelled on Avicenna is more entitled than Islamic dialectical theology, or *kalām*, to be the discipline deputed to speak about God.

The reception of Avicenna's metaphysics in subsequent Arabic thought is multifaceted, and detailed work in this immense area has only begun in recent decades. Previous scholarship has established the following landmarks:

First, a clear distinction between the direct vs. the indirect influence of Avicenna's metaphysics, i.e., between those who actually consulted his works, and those whose knowledge depended on earlier readers of Avicenna. A case of the latter way of transmission are the two very influential text-books of Qur'anic schools (madrasas), Aṭīr al-Dīn al-Abharī's (d. 660H/1262 or 663H/1265) *Hidāyat al-ḥikma*, and Nağm al-Dīn al-Kātībī al-Qazwīnī (d. 1276) *Ḥikmat al-'ayn*, whose metaphysical sections are largely dependent on Avicenna and decisively contributed to its dissemination.

Second, three main attitudes towards Avicenna's metaphysics in post-Avicennian Arabic philosophy can tentatively be outlined: acceptance, revision, and rejection. A decidedly favorable setting is represented by a network of scholars, along at least three generations of Avicenna's school members, who explicitly connected

themselves with the master's teaching. Significantly, some of the most direct disciples of Avicenna, like Abū l-ʿAbbās Faḍl ibn Muḥammad al-Lawkarī (V–VI/XI–XII c.), are the models to which later heirs of Avicenna's metaphysics ideally refer (see, for instance, Ġiyāṭ al-Dīn Maṣṣūr ibn Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Daštakī Šīrāzī, d. 948H/1542).

On the opposite side, a “conservative” reaction to Avicenna's metaphysics (and to Avicenna's philosophy in general) was represented by the efforts of reinstating the pre-Avicennian status of this discipline. This goal was pursued in various ways. Some, like Šihābaddīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and the fabricators of Arabic Pseudo-Platonica in the twelfth century, took Pythagoras' and Plato's thought as true philosophy, thus supplanting the Aristotelian tradition to which Avicenna belonged. Others, like Ibn Rushd/Averroes (d. 1198), whose three commentaries on the *Metaphysics* contain recurrent criticisms of Avicenna, redirected attention to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* itself, with the aim of restoring the original purport of Aristotle's foundational text against Avicenna's innovations. Still others, such as ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baġdādī (d. 1231), conceived metaphysics as a mere juxtaposition of the Kindian and Farabian perspectives on metaphysics, thus resolving the Avicennian synthesis into its constituents. In addition to these anachronistic attempts that surface both in the East and in the West of the Muslim world and are advanced by philosophers in the strict sense, there were also the attacks launched against philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular, by Muslim theologians, most famously by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*). Significantly, however, all the critics of Avicenna, regardless whether philosophers or theologians, are also indebted to his thought, and in their eyes Avicenna's metaphysics represents metaphysics *tout court*.

A further intermediate line of influence, which is the one that ultimately prevails, is the fruitful and positive “contamination” of Avicenna's metaphysics with systems of thought originally foreign to it. This happened, for example, with regard to the theory of illumination (Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Šhrazūrī, 2nd half of the VII/XIIIc.), or to sufism (Muḥyī' al-Dīn ibn ʿArabī, d. 1240; Ibn Sabʿīn of Murcia, c. 1217–1270; Šadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, 1207–1274). But the most noteworthy aspect of this tendency — which possibly starts in the cultural environment where al-Ġazālī was formed — is the adoption of Avicenna's metaphysics by Muslim theologians or *mutakallimūn*. In general, the tendency to integrate Avicenna's metaphysics into new doctrinal settings represents the most interesting area of its reception, since a thorough and solid grasp of Avicenna's original stance is required to adapt it properly to an illuminationist, mystical, or theological context. Together with the trends towards acceptance or rejection, this tendency to revise stretches over a period which is much longer than the pre-Avicennian phase of *falsafa*.

Third, in a diachronic perspective, within the vast scenario of the reception of Avicenna's philosophy, after the first main period of impact already documented in scholarship (from Avicenna's death until the middle of the VIII/XIV c.), further later significant phases of influence in different areas of the Islamic world (Persia, India, Ottoman empire) are emerging. This temporal progression and geographical expansion involve metaphysics as a prime element.

A key factor in the evaluation of the later impact of Avicenna's metaphysics is the assessment of which of his works mainly influenced later reflections on metaphysics, their ways of transmission, and their audience, since each of them, as we have seen, conveys a particular version and format of metaphysics. Among them, the metaphysical section of the *Book of Pointers and Reminders* has been singled out in scholarship because of the proliferation of independent commentaries on it from the late XII until the early XVIII century by leading figures of Arabic philosophy like Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274). Scholars attribute the success of Avicenna's *Pointers and Reminders* to doctrinal, stylistic, and chronological factors. Doctrinally, Avicenna's use of the essence-existence distinction to support the distinction between the ontological constituents that are intrinsically necessary (like the essence of something) and those that are extrinsically necessary (like its existence) was particularly obvious in the *Pointers and Reminders*.

Stylistically, the work's limited size and its abbreviated and allusive style invited elaboration and commentary. Chronologically, this was Avicenna's final comprehensive work and therefore could be taken as the definitive expression of his views. For these reasons, the *Pointers and Reminders* are currently considered to be the work of Avicenna privileged by subsequent Muslim philosophers (including the *mutakallimūn*).

The Science of Divine Things also played an important role in spreading Avicenna's metaphysics among later advocates of this discipline. This is evident from its extensive manuscript tradition, the vast exegetical activity devoted to *The Cure/Healing*, and the frequent and widespread quotations of *The Science of Divine Things* among post-Avicennian authors. Transmitted by a huge number of manuscripts (more numerous and older than the ones of the *Pointers and Reminders* currently known), *The Science of Divine Thing* and the other parts of the *Cure/Healing* were copied uninterruptedly for nine centuries, from the end of V/XI century, a few decades after Avicenna's death, until the XIV/XX century. Its exegetical tradition is first attested in the form of marginalia, which never circulated independently from manuscripts before the X/XVI c, when the earliest extant independent commentaries on the text, in fact collections of marginal glosses in self-standing book format, started to be produced. The *ta'liqāt* of Ġiyāṭ al-Dīn Daštakī Šīrāzī and of Šadrā al-Dīn (Mullā Šadrā) al-Šīrāzī (d. 1640) are noteworthy instances of this trend, at the time of a new-born interest in *The Cure/Healing*, and of an apparent loss of interest in the *Pointers and Reminders*, whose commentatorial activity begins to decrease. Later lemmatic commentaries, like the one by Muḥammad Maḥdī ibn Abī Ḍarr al-Narāqī (d. 1794/5), like its ancestors, cover only parts of *The Science of Divine Things*, since the work in its entirety—455 pages in the current printing—was too huge to be commented line by line, and no integral commentary has ever been written on it or on one of the other twenty-one sections of *The Cure/Healing*, let alone on the *summa* in its entirety. Finally, *The Science of Divine Things* is abundantly quoted by a wide array of scholars and writings, including the commentators on the *Pointers and Reminders*, as the reference work to be consulted in case of theoretical uncertainties or for doctrinal integrations and developments. The lithographic printing of the *The Science of Divine Things* produced at Tehran towards the end of the 19th century (1885–1888), where Mullā Šadrā's commentary precedes Avicenna's text and this latter is glossed by means of an exorbitant amount of marginalia, provides a vivid representation of the exegetical accretions that the work underwent along the centuries.

In this context, the metaphysical sections of *The Book of Science for 'Alā'-al-Dawla* and of *The Book of Salvation* should also be taken into account. The former work obtained wide resonance since it was taken as a model and incorporated by al-Ġazālī in his exposition of philosophy (*The Intentions of the philosophers, Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*), a conduit for Avicenna's metaphysics in the West as well. The latter work was copied in manuscripts at a very ancient stage, and it was commented upon by important scholars like Zāhir al-Dīn ibn Funduq al-Bayhaqī (d. 1169–1170) and Faḥr al-Dīn al-Isfarā'inī al-Nīsābūrī (fl. VI/XII c.).

At the present stage of research, we can tentatively conclude that no single work of Avicenna conveyed his metaphysical thought to later centuries, although it is premature to assess how these different writings interacted or competed in transmitting Avicenna's view of metaphysics. It is therefore difficult to say which of these works enjoyed the status of Avicenna's most influential metaphysical work. In this respect, the wide manuscript diffusion, the intense commentatorial activity, and the high consideration enjoyed by *The Science of Divine Things* deserve special attention: the transmission process of this work crosses the centuries and represents an uninterrupted trail of post-Avicennian philosophy, from Avicenna's first disciples until today, unattested in the case of the other metaphysical works by Avicenna. In the continuum represented by the circulation of *The Science of Divine Things*, one may discern a peak: this is the Safavid era in Iran (XVI–XVIII c.), which—if it is right to call “golden age” of Arabic philosophy the period 1100–1350—can be labelled the “platinum” age of the reception of Avicenna's metaphysics. But this peak has firm roots in previous centuries, especially in the key-figure of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and his school, and extends both backwards and forwards, in the larger frame of post-Avicennian *falsafa*.

9. Conclusion

The study of Arabic metaphysics can be approached from a variety of interconnected perspectives. On the historical side, one can follow a group of interrelated trends, such as the way in which the *Metaphysics* was transmitted into Arabic and integrated in the culture of its new environment, how it interacted with the Arabic reception of other fundamental works of Aristotle (above all the *Posterior Analytics*, but also the *Categories*), and how it instantiated in Arabic philosophy the main Greek paradigms of interpretation of the Aristotelian *corpus* (the Athenian background of al-Kindī's philosophy vs. the Alexandrian heritage of the Aristotelians of Baghdad, or the purer Peripatetism of al-Fārābī vs. the Platonizing Aristotelianism of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī and his followers). On the theoretical side, the epistemological reflection on metaphysics as a science undertaken by Arabic philosophers, in the effort to transform Aristotle's still imperfect discipline into a full-fledged and rigorous scientific discourse, redirects attention from the *Metaphysics* (with capital "M") to metaphysics (with lower-case "m"). More generally, outside the narrower scope of the history and the epistemic evolution of metaphysics, it is interesting to observe how the introduction of a foreign pagan discipline, like metaphysics, into a monotheistic social context, like the Islamic one, determined either the harmony or the antagonism between philosophical theology and revealed theology, or, in other words, between the quintessence of *falsafa*, on the one hand, and the speculation of *kalām*, on the other. The study of the ways in which this confrontation took place in the Islamic culture of the Middle Ages may shed light on the contemporary debate on the relationship between reason and faith and contribute to the promotion of a moderate version of Islam and of dialogue and tolerance among distinct religions.

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