

ALBERT THE GREAT AND HIS ARABIC SOURCES

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Albert the Great and his Arabic Sources

Medieval Science between Inheritance and Emergence

Edited by

KATJA KRAUSE AND RICHARD C. TAYLOR

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Chapter 12. Inheritance and Emergence of Transcendentals*

Albert the Great between Avicenna and Averroes on First Universals

Recent studies have drawn attention to the centrality of the doctrine of the primary and most universal concepts ('existent', 'thing', 'one', 'true', etc.) — the so-called 'transcendentals' — in both Arabic and in Latin medieval philosophy,¹ and to the seminal role that discussions of the topic in the Arabic cultural

* This paper is a revised and enlarged version of Bertolacci, 'Albert the Great, *Metaph.* IV, 1, 5', which was presented at the conference 'Universals in the XIII Century', organized by Gabriele Galluzzo at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa on 5–7 September 2011. I am deeply grateful to the organizer, all the participants, and especially the late Prof. Francesco Del Punta for invaluable remarks received on that occasion. My sincere gratitude also goes to Prof. David Twetten, as well as to the editors of the present volume, for their careful reading and insightful comments on the first draft, and to Kate Sturge for her help with the style editing. The essay is part of the research project 'Itineraries of Philosophy and Science from Baghdad to Florence: Albert the Great, his Sources and his Legacies (2023–2025)', funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (PRIN 2022, 20225LFCMZ), in the framework of the PNRR M4C2 funded by NextGenerationEU.

¹ On transcendentals in Arabic philosophy, see Adamson, 'Before Essence and Existence'; Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*; Menn, 'Al-Fārābī's *Kitāb al-Hurūf*'; Aertsen, 'Avicenna's Doctrine of the Primary Notions'; Bertolacci, "'Necessary" as Primary Concept in Avicenna's Metaphysics'; Koutzarova, *Das Transzendente bei Ibn Sina*; Bertolacci, 'The Distinction of Essence and Existence'; Wisnovsky, 'Essence and Existence'; Menn, 'Fārābī in the Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics'; Benevise, *Essentialität und Notwendigkeit*; De Haan, *Necessary Existence and the Doctrine of Being*; Janos, *Avicenna on the Ontology of Pure Quiddity*. For a general account of the various formulations of this doctrine in Latin philosophy, see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, which is now the fundamental study on the topic. Goris, *Transzendente Einheit*, addresses primarily the Scotist tradition of the transcendental unity.

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context played in its development in the Latin one.² Although the importance of Albert the Great (d. 1280) in the transmission of the doctrine of transcendentals from Arabic into Latin has been noted,³ his specific contribution still needs precise assessment. Some scholars have stressed (perhaps even exaggerated) the novelty of his approach;⁴ others have viewed his formulations of the issue as historically propaedeutic to later, more developed views.⁵ Still lacking is a systematic investigation of his position, especially in his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, where scholarly attention has focused primarily on *ens* as the subject matter of metaphysics, leaving the other transcendentals in the background.⁶

In a pioneering article of 1994, Alain de Libera analysed the Latin reception of Avicenna's (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1037) doctrine of transcendental unity, showing how deeply and extensively Averroes's (Ibn Rushd, d. 1198) criticism of this Avicennian doctrine influenced Latin readers. De Libera convincingly documented the fact that many Latin logicians and metaphysicians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, including Albert the Great, shared Averroes's polemical attitude towards Avicenna, drawing from Averroes the arguments by means of which they portrayed and discarded Avicenna's doctrine of transcendental unity. As de Libera put it, 'les Latins se sont approprié le texte d'Avicenne à travers le prisme averroïste.'⁷ Among the various texts he discussed, de Libera pointed to an important passage of Albert's commentary on the *Metaphysics*, namely digression IV.1.5, on which I focus in the present paper.

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- 2 On the importance of the Arabic discussion of primary concepts for the genesis of the Latin doctrine of transcendentals, see Craemer-Ruegenberg, "Ens est quod primum cadit in intellectu"; de Libera, 'D'Avicenne à Averroès, et retour'; Aertsen, "Res" as Transcendental'; Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, chap. 2.4; Pini, 'Scotus and Avicenna'; Bertolacci, 'Reading Aristotle with Avicenna'.
- 3 See Aertsen, 'Albert's Doctrine on the Transcendentals'; Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, pp. 46–49 and 177–207.
- 4 On the basis of the passage of his commentary on the *Metaphysics* in which he refers to *prima et transcendentia* — Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I.1.2, ed. by Geyer (hereafter *In Metaph.*), p. 5, vv. 13–14 — Albert is credited with a conception of metaphysics as transcendental science, in anticipation of Duns Scotus's later famous formulation (see, for example, Aertsen, 'Albert's Doctrine on the Transcendentals', p. 618). However, this passage is open to various interpretations. In particular, the expression *prima et transcendentia* in Albert's text is closely connected with the analogous expression *causae omnium et principia* that immediately precedes it (*In Metaph.*, I.1.2, p. 5, vv. 12–13). This close link seems to suggest a 'non-transcendental' sense of *transcendens*, that is, it points at what transcends the physical order in a vertical, hierarchical direction, rather than at what transcends the categorial divisions in a horizontal perspective.
- 5 In Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, the chapter devoted to Albert (chap. 5, pp. 177–207) bears the title 'Albert the Great: Different Traditions of Thought and the Transcendentals', signalling from the very beginning a certain lack of coherence in Albert's global view of the topic. Previous studies expressly devoted to Albert's doctrine of transcendentals are Kühle, 'Die Lehre Alberts des Grossen'; de Libera, 'D'Avicenne à Averroès, et retour'; Tarabochia Canavero, 'I "sancti" e la dottrina'; Gabbani, 'Le proprietà trascendentali'.
- 6 See Zimmermann, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik?*, pp. 186–98; Noone, 'Albert on the Subject of Metaphysics' including the bibliography.
- 7 De Libera, 'D'Avicenne à Averroès, et retour', p. 146.

This text is worthy of consideration in several respects. Firstly, it has the structure of a *quaestio*, with *argumenta contra*, *solutio*, and *responsio ad argumenta* — a peculiarity indicating that Albert’s commentary on the *Metaphysics*, as well as his other Aristotelian commentaries, cannot be straightforwardly classified as ‘paraphrases’ but have a wider stylistic frame, including the *commentum per quaestiones*. Secondly, despite being part of a commentary on the *Metaphysics*, the passage relates to a discussion of transcendental unity performed by a non-metaphysician, namely a *sophista* — a term that *prima facie* refers to some Latin logician of the Faculty of Arts contemporary with Albert, although it may simply mean ‘opponent of Aristotle.’⁸ Finally, the passage reveals Albert’s desire to rescue Avicenna from Averroes’s criticism. Albert’s defensive attitude towards Avicenna is not unusual. In his early work *De homine* (q. 4, a. 3), for example, on the issue of whether a soul can be the form of simple bodies like the heavens, Albert contends that Avicenna’s doctrine of the animation of heavens can be saved — that is, can be made acceptable — by ‘doing violence to his words.’⁹ The case I am going to discuss is different. There, Albert does not save Avicenna by forcing or deforming his text, or by rejecting Averroes’s criticism *in toto*, as he does elsewhere,¹⁰ but by modifying the purport of the criticism put forward by Averroes.

As to the first aspect of digression IV.1.5, its *quaestio* structure, a thorough analysis of Albert’s method in the Aristotelian commentaries, with regard to our

8 De Libera, ‘D’Avicenne à Averroès, et retour’, p. 156, views the reference to the ‘sophists’ (*sophistae*) in the title of the digression as an indication of Albert’s dependence on one or more authors of *sophismata*, on account of the expression ‘multi Parisienses non philosophiam, sed sophismata sunt secuti’ in Albertus Magnus, *De quindecim problematibus*, probl. 1, ed. by Geyer, p. 34, vv. 55–57, as well of the evidence provided by contemporary *sophismata* literature. However, it appears unlikely that an author of *sophismata* could label himself, or be called by his contemporaries, *sophista*. A less stringent use of *sophista* in this case is possible: the term occurs in a non-technical sense (meaning ‘opponent of Aristotle’) in, for example, Albertus Magnus, *In Metaph.*, IV.2.6, p. 183, v. 97; IV.3.4, p. 191, v. 77. See also the *sophismata Platonis* against Aristotle and the *elenchi sophisticis*, stemming again from Plato’s doctrine of ideas, mentioned in *ibid.*, VII.2.1, p. 338, v. 33, and VII.2.4, p. 343, vv. 38 and 50 respectively; *rationes sophisticas* against Aristotle are cited in Albert’s commentary on the *Physics* (*Physica*, VIII.1.12, ed. by Hossfeld, vol. 2, p. 572, v. 53: ‘rationes sophisticas’). In his commentary on the *Liber de causis* (*De causis et processu universitatis a causa prima*, I.3.4, ed. by Fauser, p. 40, v. 19), Albert regards the *Fons vitae* as a spurious work, falsely ascribed to Avicenna by *quidam sophistarum*. A more technical use of the term *sophista* can be seen in *In Metaph.*, IV.1.2, p. 162, v. 82–p. 163, v. 34; but also in this case, the mention of the *obiecta sophistarum* does not seem to designate a particular instance of *sophismata* literature, but merely a structured and logically organized set of objections. See Albert’s commentary on the *Liber sex principiorum*, *De Sex Principiis*, IV.5, ed. by Meyer and Möhle, p. 42, v. 10. On the difference between Albert’s digression and the specimen of *sophismata* literature to which de Libera refers, see below, note 63. See also Albert’s commentary on the *Categories*, *De praedicamentis*, I.3, ed. by Santos Noya, Steel, and Donati, p. 9, vv. 23 ff.; II.10, p. 41, vv. 23 ff.; II.12, p. 44, vv. 66 ff.

9 Albertus Magnus, *De homine*, q. 4, a. 3, ed. by Anzulewicz and Söder, p. 40, vv. 73–74: ‘Ad aliud dicendum quod si volumus salvare Avicennam, tunc faciemus vim in verbo eius’.

10 Bertolacci, “Averroes ubique Avicennam persequitur”.

text and other similar *quaestiones* has yet to be carried out.¹¹ De Libera has already taken sufficiently into account the second peculiarity of the digression: its similarity to and possible connection with contemporary *sophismata* literature. In what follows, I will focus on the third interesting aspect of the digression, the defence of Avicenna, by considering the reasons for Albert's vindication of Avicenna against Averroes and, more generally, his attitude to these two major Arabic metaphysicians.

I proceed by arguing three main points. First, Albert takes the criticism of Avicenna directly from the Latin translation of Averroes, not from an intermediate source. Second, Albert defends Avicenna from Averroes's attack because he arguably detects in Averroes's criticism some lack of internal consistency and of faithfulness to Avicenna's actual thought. Third, Albert rescues Avicenna from Averroes's criticism through a direct and keen acquaintance with the Latin translation of Avicenna's metaphysics, rather than merely through the account of Avicenna's position provided by Averroes or by some previous Latin author.¹²

Accordingly, my exposition consists of three parts. The first describes the context, translates the text, and surveys the content of the passage of the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* (*Tafsīr mā ba'da l-ṭabī'a*) in which Averroes criticizes Avicenna. The second focuses on the main problems that affect Averroes's criticism and the degree to which Albert is aware of them. The third part points to the changes that Albert introduces into the Latin translation of Averroes's text when he quotes it in his own commentary on the *Metaphysics*, and to the passages of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima* — the Latin translation of the metaphysical section, *Ilāhiyyāt* (*Science of Divine Things*), of the *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (*Book of the Cure/Healing*), his masterpiece on philosophy — that Albert has probably in mind when he defends Avicenna against Averroes.¹³

11 See, for example, Albertus Magnus, *Physica*, II.2.3, ed. by Hossfeld, p. 101, v. 84–104, v. 16. References to Albert can be found in Weijers, *In Search of the Truth*.

12 By contrast, de Libera, 'D'Avicenne à Averroès, et retour', p. 155, contends: 'Rien ne prouve, pourtant, qu'Albert soit remonté à l'original [d'Avicenne] pour répondre à l'interprète fantôme d'Ibn Sīnā baptisé du nom de *sophista*'. My impression is that, in this case, Albert uses the original text of Avicenna as well as that of Averroes (see the remarks below, note 63). I have documented Albert's direct recourse to Averroes's *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* in Bertolacci, 'Reception of Averroes' Long Commentary'; Bertolacci, 'New Phase of the Reception of Aristotle'. For his equally direct recourse to Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*, see Bertolacci, "Subtilius speculando"; Bertolacci, 'Le citazioni implicite testuali'.

13 Avicenna, *Al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, vol. 1, ed. by Qanawati and Zāyid; *Al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, vol. 2, ed. by Mūsā, Dunyā, and Zāyid (hereafter *Ilāhiyyāt*); Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, I–IV, ed. by Van Riet; Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, V–X, ed. by Van Riet. In what follows, Avicenna's work will be quoted with reference to pages and lines of the edition of the Arabic text, followed between square brackets by the pages and lines of the edition of the Latin translation. Averroes, *Tafsīr mā ba'd aṭ-ṭabī'a*, ed. by Bouyges; Averroes Latinus, *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII*. In what follows, I will cite Averroes's work indicating the book of the *Metaphysics* and the section of Averroes's exegesis (e.g., Λ.5 = Book Λ, commentum

The digression I discuss contains Albert's version of one of the most significant criticisms that Averroes addresses to Avicenna. The importance of this critique is attested by its length, its articulated structure, and the variety of topics that Averroes touches upon in an anti-Avicennian vein. After the Latin translations of Averroes's Long Commentaries on the Aristotelian corpus in the first decades of the thirteenth century, Latin thinkers — under the same Aristotelian umbrella and in the context of the same Peripatetic tradition — were faced with two alternative views of the theory and practice of philosophy, both coming from Arabic Peripateticism. In fact, Avicenna and Averroes upheld two different formulations of philosophy, in terms of style (paraphrase vs literal commentary), attitude towards Aristotle (free adaptation vs faithful endorsement), and doctrine (inclusion of non-Aristotelian views vs strict adherence to the Peripatetic tradition). Moreover, Averroes frequently and harshly criticizes Avicenna in his commentaries on Aristotle, although to varying degrees depending on the specific type of exegesis adopted (epitome, paraphrase, literal commentary) and the particular Aristotelian work commented upon. This polemical attitude reaches its climax in the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*. Hence, the Latin reception of Avicenna's *Shifā'* as a *summa* of Peripatetic philosophy was certainly influenced by its counterpart, the systematic exegesis of Aristotle's works by Averroes. The contrast was particularly sharp in the principles of natural philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics, since Latin thinkers had at their disposal both Avicenna's and Averroes's major accounts of Aristotle's *Physics*, *De anima*, and *Metaphysics* in Latin translation.

In response to this situation, two main reactions in Latin culture can be observed. On the one hand, the idea of a conflict between Avicenna and Averroes pervaded Latin philosophy from the thirteenth century onwards, taking inspiration from and amplifying Averroes's criticisms. The divergence became associated with competing cultural institutions (the Avicennian sympathies of the theologians vs the Averroean allegiance of the masters of Arts) and disciplinary fields (the 'physician' Avicenna vs the 'commentator' Averroes). It assumed religious connotations (the 'pious' Avicenna vs the 'sceptic' Averroes), corroborated by pseudo-epigraphical writings (the ps.-Avicennian *Epistula ad Sanctum Augustinum* vs the ps.-Averroean *Tractatus de tribus impostoribus*); it inspired fictive biographical tales showing the two thinkers in a personal clash; and it found vivid expressions in iconography (the 'prince' or 'king' Avicenna vs the Averroes over whom Thomas Aquinas triumphs).

On the other hand, confronted with the manifest disagreement between Avicenna and Averroes, some Latin thinkers adopted a different strategy, both historically significant and theoretically demanding: they undertook to create a synthesis between the two Arabic masters. That harmonization was an arduous path to follow, since it required a profound understanding of Avicenna's and Averroes's standpoints and an intelligent search for a 'third way' in the interpretation

5); the page number and lines of the Arabic edition (e.g., p. 1420, v. 6–p. 1421, v. 16); between square brackets, the folio and sections of the Juncta edition of the Latin translation (e.g., [fol. 292K–M]).

of the various works of Aristotle that they had reworked or commented upon, in terms of approach, style, and doctrine.

Albert the Great is an illuminating example of this second trend. He was certainly aware of the distance separating Avicenna from Averroes, and in his first Aristotelian commentaries (especially those on *Physica* and *De caelo*) indulges in the topos of their antinomy. In his more mature commentaries, however, his attitude evolves; there, rather than insisting on the differences between the two Arabic masters, he tries to establish a consensus among them. The commentary on the *Metaphysics* shows this tendency with particular clarity, and the digression I consider in this paper is a compelling specimen of Albert's mature approach to the issue.

Averroes's Criticism of Avicenna

The doctrine of transcendentals is the metaphysical doctrine of Avicenna's that Averroes criticizes most harshly in his *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*. Criticisms of this doctrine are recurrent, lengthy, and disdainful. The text I examine in this section is a prime example of this attitude, being the first, and one of the most extensive, criticisms of the topic in Averroes's *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*.¹⁴ In it, Averroes draws out several points of dissent, engages in an extended discussion, and refers to Avicenna with expressions of amazement and scorn ('Ibn Sīnā made a serious mistake [...]. What is surprising about this man [...] This man does not distinguish [...]. Several things made this man go astray'). The criticism we are concerned with is deservedly famous, although it has hitherto received only cursory analysis.¹⁵

The text occurs in the third section of Averroes's exegesis of Book Γ of the *Metaphysics*. In it, Averroes explains *Metaph.* Γ.2, 1003b22–1004a1, a passage whose translation from the Arabic runs as follows:

Text 1: Arabic translation of *Metaph.* Γ.2, 1003b22–1004a1

[A: 1003b22–32] Since 'one' and 'being' [*huwīyya*] are a single thing and have a single nature, each one of them follows the other, as principle and cause follow each other. This does not happen because a single definition signifies

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- 14 The other criticisms of Avicenna's doctrine of transcendentals occur in Averroes's commentary on books Γ, Δ, and I of the *Metaphysics*: Γ.3, p. 315, vv. 3–9 [fol. 67G]; Δ.14, p. 557, vv. 16–19 [om.]; Δ.14, p. 558, v. 17–p. 559, v. 14 [fol. 117C–D]); I.5, p. 1267, v. 15–p. 1268, v. 3 [fol. 255B]; I.8, p. 1279, v. 12–p. 1280, v. 11 [fol. 257E–G]; I.8, p. 1282, vv. 8–12 [fol. 257K]. An overview of all of the criticisms of Avicenna in Averroes's *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* is available in Bertolacci, 'From Athens to Buḥārā'; Bertolacci, 'Avicenna's and Averroes's Interpretations'.
- 15 See Forest, *La structure métaphysique*, p. 41; Gilson, *L'être et l'essence*, p. 67; O'Shaugnessy, 'St Thomas's Changing Estimate', pp. 252–53; al-Ahwani, 'Being and Substance'; Fakhry, 'Notes on Essence and Existence'; Rashed, *Essentialisme*, pp. 255–56. Related criticisms of Avicenna's doctrine of transcendentals in Averroes's *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* have been analysed by Menn, 'Fārābī in the Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics', pp. 62–64.

both, although it makes no difference as to their relationship if we believe something of this kind. For, if someone says ‘a man one’, or ‘a man is’, or ‘a man this’, he signifies a single thing, and he does not signify different things by repeating them. It is well known that the expression that says ‘man is’ or ‘man one’ does not signify different things, since there is no distinction between saying ‘man is’ and [saying] ‘man neither in generation nor in corruption’. The same happens also with the statement regarding ‘one’. It is well known that what is added in these [statements] signifies a single thing, and that ‘one’ does not signify something other and different from ‘being’.

[B: 1003b32–33] We also say that the substance of each thing is one not accidentally. Therefore, we say that the substance of every thing is being.

[C: 1003b33–1004a1] It is well known that the forms of ‘one’ are as many as the forms of ‘being’, and [that] to a single science belongs the absolute investigation of these forms and the knowledge of what they are. I mean: to a single science belongs the investigation of ‘congruent’, ‘similar’, the other things resembling these, etc. In sum, all the contraries refer to this first science.¹⁶

In this passage, Aristotle holds: (A) that ‘being’ and ‘one’ are the same thing and a unique nature, and that neither signifies something different from what the other signifies; (B) that the substance of everything is essentially ‘being’ and ‘one’; (C) that the species of ‘being’ are as numerous as the species of ‘one’ and that their study belongs to the same science, namely, metaphysics.¹⁷

16 Averroes, *Tafsīr mā ba’d at-Ṭabī’a*, ed. by Bouyges, vol. 1, p. 310, v. 2–p. 311, v. 4. The Arabic-Latin translation of this passage in the *Metaphysica nova* that was available to Albert reads as follows in the Juncta printing: ‘[A] Unum autem et ens, cum sint idem et habeant eandem naturam, consecutio utriusque ad alterum est sicut consecutio principii et causae unius ad alterum, non quia eadem definitio significat utrumque. Nulla autem differentia est inter ea, etsi existimantes fuerimus tali existimatione. Sermo enim dicentis “homo unus” aut “homo est” aut “homo iste” idem significat, et non diversa significat apud iterationem. Manifestum est enim quod sermo dicens “homo iste” et “homo unus” et “homo est” non significat diversa, cum non sit differentia inter dicere “homo iste” et “homo neque in generatione neque in corruptione”. Et similiter est etiam de uno. Manifestum est igitur quod additio in istis significat idem et non significat unum aliud ab ente. [B] Et etiam substantia cuiuslibet est una non modo accidentali. Et ideo dicimus quod substantia cuiuslibet unius communis est esse eius. [C] Manifestum est igitur quod formae unius sunt secundum numerum formarum entis et unius scientiae est consideratio similiter de istis formis, scilicet quod unius scientiae est consideratio de convenienti et simili et de aliis rebus similibus. Et universaliter omnia contraria attribuntur huic primae scientiae’ (Averroes Latinus, *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII*, fol. 66G–K, with punctuation changed). The critical edition in preparation by Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Andreas Büttner provides a slightly different text, which does not, however, substantially diverge from that printed in the Juncta edition.

17 A thorough account of the doctrine of this passage, its various possible interpretations, and the scholarly discussions thereupon can be found in Castelli, *Problems and Paradigms of Unity*, pp. 51–55. Averroes holds the second interpretation of lines 1003b32–33 mentioned by Castelli (‘the relation of one and being to essences as non accidental’, p. 54, n. 8).

In his commentary on this passage of Aristotle, elaborating on all three points, Averroes criticizes Avicenna's position concerning points A and B, excluding from his criticism point C. According to Averroes, Avicenna proposed a view of the mutual relationship between 'being' and 'one' (issue A), and of the relationship between 'being' and 'one' and essence (issue B), that is decidedly different from Aristotle's, and therefore wrong. According to Averroes, Avicenna holds that 'being' and 'one' do not signify one and the same thing (issue A), and that they are not identical to the thing's substance or essence, but rather superadded and accidental to it (issue B).

One should notice that in Averroes's account of Avicenna, Avicenna's position on issue A — the identity or difference of 'being' and 'one' — is adduced as the reason for his position on issue B, their essential or accidental status. Since for Avicenna (*apud Averroem*) 'being' and 'one' do not signify one and the same thing (issue A), they cannot be essential attributes (issue B). The rationale behind the causal relationship of A with respect to B that Averroes posits seems to be that if someone takes 'being' and 'one' to be distinct from one another, that person is forced to endorse their accidentality, because if they were essential attributes, they would necessarily signify one and the same thing: the essence. I will discuss this feature of Averroes's report of Avicenna in detail in the next part of this paper.

Averroes's criticism of Avicenna is reported in Table 1 together with the *loci paralleli* in Avicenna. It consists of three main parts, each of which can be further subdivided. In the first part, Averroes expounds Avicenna's incorrect thesis, underscoring the gravity of its error. In the second, he declares Avicenna's main argument invalid. In the third, he points out the doctrinal roots of Avicenna's error.

In part 1, Averroes posits what he regards as the error of Avicenna: the consideration of 'existent' (the most usual equivalent of 'being' in Arabic philosophy) and 'one' as non-essential features, more precisely as distinct attributes superadded to the essence of things (1.1). In the section that immediately follows, 1.2, Averroes stresses the gravity of this mistake, adding some interesting considerations on the theological background of Avicenna's metaphysics that cannot be addressed in detail here.¹⁸

In part 2, Averroes ascribes to Avicenna an argument that, in his opinion, functions as the proof of Avicenna's thesis in 1.1. Averroes's intent in this part is to show that this argument is invalid and the reasons why it is invalid. The argument in question acts as a *reductio ad absurdum*, of which Averroes reports only the main part: if 'existent' and 'one' did not signify attributes superadded to the essence — contrary to what Avicenna holds — then they would signify the same notion or item (the Arabic term *ma'nān* occurring here can express both ideas), namely the essence itself; but in that case a proposition such as 'the existent is one' would be a tautology, which is not the case (2.1). Implicitly, the

18 The theological underpinnings of the discussion may explain Averroes's use of the theologically loaded term 'attribute' (*sifa*) in section 1.1.

next step in the argument is that the premise leading to the false conclusion just reached — namely the premise that posits that ‘existent’ and ‘one’ do not signify attributes superadded to the essence — is false and its contrary — that ‘existent’ and ‘one’ do signify attributes superadded to the essence — is true, as Avicenna wishes.

Table 1. Averroes’s criticism of Avicenna together with the *loci paralleli* in Avicenna.

<p>AVERROES, LONG COMMENTARY ON THE METAPHYSICS, Γ.3, ED. BY BOUYGES, P. 313, V. 6–P. 314, V. 11</p>	<p>AVICENNA, AL-SHIFĀ’, AL-ILĀHIYYĀT, VOL. 1, ED. BY QANAWATĪ AND ZĀYID; VOL. 2, ED. BY MŪSĀ, DUNYĀ, AND ZĀYID</p>
<p>[1.1] Ibn Sinā made a great mistake in this regard, since he believed that ‘one’ [<i>wāḥid</i>] and ‘existent’ [<i>mawjūd</i>] signify attributes that are added [<i>ṣifāt zā’ida</i>] to the thing’s essence [<i>dhāt</i>].</p> <p>[1.2] What is surprising about this man is how he made this mistake despite having heard [the teaching of] the Ash’arite theologians, whose theology he mixed in his divine science. [...]</p> <p>[2.1] This man argues for his doctrine by saying that, if ‘one’ and ‘existent’ signified a single notion/item [<i>ma’nān</i>],</p> <p>the statement ‘existent is one’ would be a futility [<i>ḥadhr</i>], like the statement ‘existent is existent’ and ‘one is one’.</p> <p>[2.2.1] But this [absurdity] would necessarily follow only if someone contended that saying of one and the same thing [<i>shay’</i>], ‘it is existent’ and ‘[it is] one’ signifies a single</p>	<p>III.2, p. 103, v. 9 [p. 114, vv. 19–20]: neither of them [i.e., ‘one’ and ‘existent’] signifies the substance of any thing</p> <p>V.1, p. 196, v. 13 [p. 229, v. 37]: unity is an attribute [<i>ṣifa</i>] that is joined [<i>taqṭarinu</i>] with horseness, so that horseness, with this attribute, is one</p> <p>V.1, p. 198, v. 6 [p. 230, v. 68]: [to be one or many] is like something that is consequent from outside [<i>yalḥaqu min khārij</i>] to humanity (cf. V.1, p. 198, v. 3 [p. 230, v. 64]; p. 198, v. 8 [p. 230, vv. 71–72])</p> <p>VIII.4, p. 347, v. 9 [p. 402, vv. 45–46]: existence occurs from outside [<i>ya’riḍu min khārij</i>] to the quiddities of things other than God</p> <p>cf. VII.1, p. 303, vv. 9–10 [p. 349, vv. 15–17]: If the concept [<i>mafhūm</i>] of ‘one’ were [...] the concept of ‘existent’,</p> <p>[...] in every way [<i>min kulli jiha</i>] [...]</p> <p>then ‘many’ — qua ‘many’ — would not be ‘existent’, as it is not ‘one’.</p> <p>cf. I.5, p. 31, v. 10–p. 32, v. 2 [p. 35, v. 62–p. 36, v. 79]</p>

AVERROES, *LONG COMMENTARY ON THE METAPHYSICS*, Γ.3, ED. BY BOUYGES, P. 313, V. 6–P. 314, V. 11

AVICENNA, *AL-SHIĀʿ, AL-ILĀHIYYĀT*, VOL. 1, ED. BY QANAWATĪ AND ZĀYID; VOL. 2, ED. BY MŪSĀ, DUNYĀ, AND ZĀYID

notion/item [*māʿnan*] according to a single way [*jīha*] and to a single mode [*naḥw*],

[2.2.2] whereas we have only said that these two [terms] signify a single essence [*dhāt*] in different modes [*anḥāʾ muḥtalifa*],

[2.2.3] not different attributes [*ṣifāt mukhtalifa*] added to it [i.e., to a single essence].

[2.3] According to this man, therefore, there is no distinction between the expressions that signify different modes of a single essence [*dhāt*], without signifying notions/items added to it, and the expressions that signify attributes added to a single essence, namely other [*mughāyira*] than it in actuality.

[3.1] [Several] things made this man go astray. One of them is that he found that the name ‘one’ belongs to the derived names [*asmāʾ mushtaqqā*],

and [that] these names signify an accident [*ʿaraḍ*] and a substance.

[3.2] Another reason is that he believes that the name ‘one’ signifies a notion/item [*māʿnan*] in the thing, [namely] ‘lacking division’,

and that this notion/item is different from the notion/item that is the [thing’s] nature.

[3.3.1] Another reason is that he believes that this ‘one’ said of all the categories is the ‘one’ that is the principle of number.

But number is an accident [*ʿaraḍ*].

Therefore he was convinced that the name ‘one’ signifies an accident [*ʿaraḍ*] of existents.

[3.3.2] But the ‘one’ that is the principle of number is only one of the existents of which

III.3, p. 110, vv. 2–3 [p. 122, vv. 67–69]: the predicate [i.e., ‘one’] [...] derives its name [*mushtaqq al-ism*] from the name of a simple item, i.e., from the item ‘unity’

III.2, p. 97, vv. 4–5 [p. 107, vv. 77–79]: ‘One’ is said equivocally of items sharing the fact of lacking any division in actuality, insofar as each of them is what it is

III.3, pp. 106, vv. 12–13 [p. 117, vv. 83–85]: unity does not enter into the determination of the quiddity of any substance [...]

III.1, p. 95, vv. 16–17 [p. 107, vv. 67–69]: ‘one’ has a tight relation with ‘existent’ [...] ‘one’ is a principle, in a way, of quantity

III.3, p. 110, v. 4 [p. 122, vv. 70–71]: number [...] is an accident [*ʿaraḍ*]

III.3, p. 106, v. 15 [p. 117, v. 87]: unity is the notion that is the accident [*ʿaraḍ*]; p. 109, v. 10 [p. 121, vv. 51–52]: the essence of unity is an accidental [*ʿaraḍī*] notion; p. 110, vv. 3–4 [p. 122, vv. 69–70]: that simple item [i.e., unity] is an accident; [...] unity is an accident

AVERROES, *LONG COMMENTARY ON THE METAPHYSICS*, Γ.3, ED. BY BOUYGES, P. 313, V. 6–P. 314, V. 11

AVICENNA, *AL-SHIFĀ', AL-ILĀHIYYĀT*, VOL. 1, ED. BY QANAWATĪ AND ZĀYID; VOL. 2, ED. BY MŪSĀ, DUNYĀ, AND ZĀYID

the name 'one' is said, although it is the worthiest of them to be [said 'one'], as you will learn in the ninth treatise of this book.

After expounding Avicenna's argument, Averroes shows that it is based on an incorrect deduction. According to Averroes, the aforementioned counterintuitive conclusion (that the proposition 'the existent is one' is a tautology) follows, properly speaking, not from the premise leading to the absurd conclusion in Avicenna's argument (namely 'existent' and 'one' signify the same notion or item, with no further specification), but from a premise positing that 'existent' and 'one' signify the same notion or item *according to a single way and to a single mode* (2.2.1). Averroes argues that, once the premise leading to it is fully articulated, the absurd conclusion of the argument is harmless with respect to Aristotle's position, since Aristotle, as Averroes interprets him ('we have [...] said'), holds the opposite of the premise at stake ('existent' and 'one' signify the same essence according to different modes, 2.2.2). In 2.2.3, Averroes remarks that Aristotle's and his own thesis is different from the thesis that Avicenna intends to corroborate by means of this argument ('existent' and 'one' signify distinct attributes added to the essence).

In 2.3, Averroes concludes this part of the criticism by maintaining that Avicenna's defective formulation of the premise, leading to the absurd conclusion in his argument, shows that Avicenna missed the fundamental distinction capable of discriminating between his own position and a position like the one advocated by Averroes in the footsteps of Aristotle: namely, a distinction between expressions that signify different modes of an essence (that is, Averroes's position with regard to 'existent' and 'one') and expressions that signify attributes added to the essence (that is, Avicenna's own position with regard to 'existent' and 'one'). The implicit assumption of Averroes's discourse is that Avicenna manifestly lacks an indispensable theoretical tool to deal with such intricate metaphysical topics as the present one (a critique of Avicenna that Averroes also formulates in other cases).

The third part of Averroes's text contains three arguments that he considers to be the remote causes of Avicenna's error in 1.1. All three indicate the non-essential character of unity, arguing either that 'one' is an accident of the essence (3.1, 3.3) or that it is different from the essence (3.2). The exposition of the last of these arguments (3.3.1) is followed by a criticism (3.3.2).

A Puzzling Criticism

The main tenets of Averroes's report can be summarized as follows (the points made implicitly by Averroes are added in square brackets):

Outline 1: Summary of parts 1–3

1.1 (B) Avicenna's thesis (t_{IS}): 'one' and 'existent' signify [distinct] attributes added to the essence

2.1 (A) Avicenna's argument: if ($\neg t_{IS}$) 'one' and 'existent' signified a single notion/item, then the proposition 'the existent is one' would be a tautology [therefore 'one' and 'existent' do not signify the essence, if the essence is meant as the single notion/item in question]

2.2.1 (A) Avicenna's argument emended by Averroes: if ($\neg t_{IR}$) 'one' and 'existent' signified a single notion/item *according to a single way and to a single mode*, then the proposition 'the existent is one' would be a tautology

2.2.2 (B) The emended argument is harmless with respect to Averroes's thesis (t_{IR}), according to which 'existent' and 'one' signify a single essence according to different ways and modes

2.2.3 (B) Averroes's thesis (t_{IR}) is different from Avicenna's thesis (t_{IS})

2.3 (B) Avicenna is unaware of the distinction between (t_{IR}) and (t_{IS}), namely between expressions that signify different modes of a single essence vs expressions that signify attributes added to a single essence

3 (B_1) The remote cause of Avicenna's error: 'one' signifies an accident (3.1; 3.3.1); it signifies a notion/item different from the essence (3.2)

Averroes's report of Avicenna's position is puzzling in various ways. First of all, it consists of a discontinuous series of distinct sections dealing with different issues and topics, which Averroes assembles from several Avicennian *loci*, rather than from a single text by Avicenna, and integrates with his own views. Moreover, the transitions between the three main parts and their distinct sections show some logical inconsistencies. In particular, the two issues A and B that Averroes causally connects in his report of Avicenna's position appear, in principle, logically independent: one can argue that 'being' and 'one' are identical to one another or different from one another (issue A), regardless of their being essential or accidental features (issue B).¹⁹ Finally, in a few notable instances, Averroes appears to be seriously distorting Avicenna's point of view, either by selecting arbitrarily some of Avicenna's different statements on a given issue, or by reporting the assertions he selects in a form substantially different from Avicenna's original

19 One can easily imagine two things, such as 'being' and 'one' in the present case, as essential and distinct from one another, e.g., 'animal' and 'rational' with respect to 'man', or as accidental and identical to one another, e.g., 'unmarried' and 'wifeless' with respect to 'man', whereas Averroes seems to suppose that they are either essential and identical, or accidental and distinct.

one.²⁰ I will now analyse the three types of problems just mentioned, with regard to (i) the articulation, (ii) the cogency, and (iii) the congruity of Averroes's text with Avicenna's actual position.

Regarding problem (i), the most remarkable aspect of Averroes's criticism is that parts 1 and 3 deal with issue B, namely the relationship between 'existent', 'one', and essence (more precisely, part 3 deals with a specific instance of this issue, as we will see), whereas part 2 deals with both issue A (the reciprocal relation of 'existent' and 'one', without any explicit mention of essence) and issue B. As we can see from the outline, the initial treatment of issue B in section 1.1 is superseded by the discussion of issue A in sections 2.1 and 2.2.1. Issue B surfaces again, in connection with issue A, in sections 2.2.2, 2.2.3, and 2.3, where Averroes speaks significantly of 'a single essence'.²¹ In part 3, only issue B is taken into account, although with a narrower scope (part 3 regards only the relationship of 'one', to the exclusion of 'being', with the essence) and different philosophical concepts (the idea of accidentality replaces that of superaddition to essence). To distinguish it from issue B, I therefore label it B₁.

Due to this variation of the specific topics dealt with and the fluctuating presence of the consideration of essence, it is not immediately clear how section 1.1, which regards squarely issue B of Aristotle, relates to the subsequent sections 2.1 and 2.2.1, which are supposed to ground section 1.1 but, differently from 1.1, *prima facie* concern expressly only issue A: here, the question is whether or not 'one' and 'existent' signify the same notion or item, regardless of whether the signified notion or item is the essence or something else, and Avicenna is said to offer a negative answer to that question.

Averroes tries his best to provide a coherent account of Avicenna's position. But he does so by a series of terminological shifts that, though surely smoothing the transitions between issue B and issue A (and vice versa), do not eliminate all cleavages. A first shift of this kind emerges in the transition from section 2.2.1 to section 2.2.2. In 2.2.1, Averroes sets apart three elements in the predication of 'existent' and 'one': the 'thing' (*shay'*) of which they are predicated, the 'notion (or: item)' (*ma'nan*) that they signify, and the 'way' (*jiha*) or 'mode' (*naḥw*) by means of which they signify this notion. But in 2.2.2, he replaces the second of these three elements — the neutral term 'notion/item' (*ma'nan*) — with a much stronger term, namely 'essence' (*dhāt*), thus surreptitiously passing from the current issue A to the initial issue B.²² Conducive to the same result of bridging issue A with issue B is the shift in the meaning of the adjectives 'different'

20 The same tendency to distortion surfaces in other criticisms of Avicenna in Averroes's *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*: see O'Shaughnessy, 'St Thomas's Changing Estimate', pp. 253–55; Bertolacci, 'Averroes against Avicenna'.

21 In these sections, the adjective 'single' (*wāḥida*) is reminiscent of the previous mention of 'a single notion/item' (*ma'nan*), namely of issue A, in section 2.1; however, the change in the noun, i.e., the reintroduction of consideration of the essence raises issue B anew.

22 In this light, we can guess that the occurrence of the key term 'notion/item' (*ma'nan*) in 2.1, too, is meant by Averroes in the meaning of 'essence'.

(*mukhtalif*) and ‘other’ (*mughāyir*) in section 2.2.2 and section 2.3 respectively. In 2.2.2, ‘different’ expresses the idea that ‘existent’ and ‘one’ signify features that are distinct *from one another*, whereas ‘other’ in 2.3 expresses the idea that ‘existent’ and ‘one’ signify features that are distinct *from the essence*. Thus, it seems that Averroes is trying to connect parts 1 and 3 with part 2 as coherently as possible by means of an ambiguous use of terminology, helped by the fact that the two main terms he uses to signify the ‘notion/item’ and the ‘essence’ (*maʿnan* and *dhāt*) have a wide range of meanings and are constitutively multivocal.

On point (ii), even if we accept these terminological oscillations aimed at easing the interplay between different issues, the thesis that Averroes ascribes to Avicenna in section 2.1 is inconclusive with respect to the doctrine he attributes to Avicenna in section 1.1. In 1.1, Avicenna contends that both ‘existent’ and ‘one’ are features added to the essence, therefore extrinsic to the essence and hence non-essential. Section 1.1 is therefore meant to establish that *neither* ‘existent’ *nor* ‘one’ signifies the essence. But from the fact that ‘existent’ and ‘one’ do not signify the same notion/item in section 2.1, a much weaker thesis follows: even if we assume that the notion/item in question is the essence — thus switching from the present issue A to the original issue B — the contention in 2.1 entails that *either* ‘existent’ *or* ‘one’ does not signify the essence, and therefore that *either* ‘existent’ *or* ‘one’ is a non-essential feature. In other words, according to section 2.1 only one among ‘existent’ and ‘one’ is a non-essential feature, whereas section 1.1 aims to establish that both are non-essential features. This being the case, section 2.1 — as it is formulated, and regardless of the logical weakness that Averroes detects in Avicenna’s alleged argument — is far from being an ‘argument’ for section 1.1, contrary to what Averroes contends.

Other incongruences affect part 3. This part is allegedly intended to explain the remote causes of Avicenna’s position in section 1.1; however, it conveys a thesis that in one way is weaker, and in another way stronger, than the doctrine actually ascribed to Avicenna in 1.1. On the one hand, part 1.1 regards the relationship of both ‘one’ and ‘existent’ with the essence, whereas part 3 concerns the relationship only of ‘one’ with the essence, to the exclusion of ‘existent’. On the other, in part 1.1 ‘one’, like ‘existent’, is portrayed as an attribute superadded to a thing’s essence; in part 3, by contrast, it assumes — much more pointedly — the status of an ‘accident’ (*ʿaraḍ*) of essence. Averroes is certainly entitled to ascribe to Avicenna the doctrine of the accidentality of unity, as we will see. But part 3, being presented as an explanation of section 1.1, suggests that for Avicenna ‘existent’ is also an accident in the same sense as ‘one’ is. A parallelism of that kind looks much less warranted, as the following exposition will document. Moreover, and paradoxically, it is not immediately clear how part 3, if taken together with section 2.1, supports section 1.1 rather than invalidating it. In part 3, Avicenna contends that ‘one’ signifies a non-essential feature, or an accident, of the essence. In part 2.1, he holds that ‘existent’ and ‘one’ signify different items. This being the case, it would seem that if ‘one’ signifies an accident of the essence, ‘existent’ does not signify an accident of the essence as well; but if ‘existent’ does not signify an

accident of the essence, it has arguably good chances of signifying the essence, contrary to what part 1.1 contends.²³

Finally, regarding point (iii): The fullest expression of Avicenna's view of the mutual relationship of 'existent' and 'one' and of their relationship with essence can be found in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'*, a work with which Averroes was surely acquainted and from which he mainly drew his knowledge of Avicenna's philosophy.²⁴ In this work, Avicenna offers a variety of statements on the issue.²⁵ Section 1.1 can be compared with some of these statements of Avicenna's, with the following differences. First, by calling 'one' and 'existent' 'attributes' (*ṣifāt*), Averroes selects a substantive rarely used by Avicenna.²⁶ Second, the idea of externality conveyed by the participle 'added' (*zā'ida*) has no verbatim correspondence in Avicenna, although this participle can be compared with the phrase 'from outside' (*min khārij*) that Avicenna uses adverbially, mostly in the case of 'one',²⁷ but also in the case of 'existent'.²⁸ Here, Averroes disregards the most frequent Arabic root used by Avicenna to express the relationship of 'existent', 'one', and essence, from the beginning until the end of the *Ilāhiyyāt*, namely the root *l-z-m*, which conveys the idea of inseparable concomitance (lit.: 'clinging') more than that of externality.²⁹ Significantly, this is the only root used by Avicenna

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- 23 Part 3 of Averroes's criticism becomes compatible with and explanatory of the doctrine of part 1.1 only if we assume that 'existent' and 'one' *do* signify the same type of item, i.e., an accident *large loquendo*, as part 1.1 contends, but *do not* signify the same token of this item: since they do not signify the same specific accident, they comply with the requirement of not signifying the same item imposed by part 2.1 on 'existent' and 'one'. But this precision remains entirely implicit in Averroes's text. Not even the corrections that Averroes deems necessary to make part 2.1 conclusive — namely, to assume that 'existent' and 'one' signify the same item in different ways — seem sufficient to solve the impasse.
- 24 On Averroes's knowledge of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Shifā'*, see Bertolacci, "Incepit quasi a se".
- 25 A wide sample of these statements is analysed in Bertolacci, 'Reception of Avicenna', pp. 256–59.
- 26 It is used only once, at the singular, for 'one', in Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt*, V.1, p. 196, v. 13 [p. 229, v. 37] (see Table 1).
- 27 See, for instance, *ibid.*, V.1, p. 198, v. 6 [p. 230, v. 68], in Table 1.
- 28 See *ibid.*, VIII.4, p. 347, v. 9 [p. 402, vv. 45–46], in Table 1. See also *ibid.*, V.1, p. 201, v. 15 [p. 234, v. 46]: '[to be one or many] is a concomitant from outside (*lāzim min khārij*) of animal'. In V.1, p. 198, v. 3 [p. 230, v. 64], the adverb *min khārij*, used by Avicenna to describe the relationship of 'one' and 'many' with the 'entity' or essence (*huwiyya*) of man, is not attested by all manuscripts (it is omitted, for instance, in MSS Oxford, Bodleian Library, Pococke 125, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Pococke 110, London, British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Or. 7500, and by the Latin translation). Wisnovsky, 'Essence and Existence', p. 28 and n. 5, records one occurrence of the participles *zā'id* and *khārij* in Avicenna's *Tā'liqāt (Annotations)* (IV.32, ed. by al-'Ubaydi, p. 164, vv. 18–ult.: 'The existence of each category is extrinsic, *khārij*, to its quiddity and superadded, *zā'id*, to it; whereas the quiddity of the Necessary of Existence is its "thatness"; <and its thatness is not> superadded to [its] quiddity'). In the same context, Wisnovsky points out the doubts still surrounding the composition and Avicenna's authorship of this work.
- 29 Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt*, III.3, pp. 106, vv. 12–13 [p. 117, vv. 83–85]: 'unity does not enter into the determination of the quiddity of any substance, but it is an entity that is a concomitant [*lāzim*] of substance' (cf. III.3, p. 109, v. 10 [p. 121, vv. 51–52]; V.1, p. 201, v. 14 [p. 234, v. 44]); VI.5, p. 292, vv. 2–3 [p. 336, vv. 85–87]: 'There is a distinction [*farq*] between "thing" and "existent"

to describe the mutual relationship of essence and existence when he speaks *ex professo* about it in the *locus classicus* of chapter I.5.³⁰ Third, Averroes equates the cases of ‘one’ and ‘existent’ in his report of Avicenna’s position, taking the former as his main reference point. This procedure can be justified by the various statements in which Avicenna ascribes an equal status to the two concepts in terms of their relationship with essence,³¹ although nowhere does Avicenna speak jointly of ‘one’ and ‘existent’ as notions superadded to the essence. For all these reasons, it is hard to maintain that Averroes’s report in section 1.1 faithfully mirrors Avicenna’s standpoint: although the idea that unity is superadded to essence has a solid textual basis in Avicenna, and although ‘Avicenna’s ontology could doubtless be interpreted as implying the thesis that existence is superadded to a thing’s quiddity’, as the history of *falsafa* attests,³² Avicenna looks to convey a view of existence and essence in which these two items are, primarily, two inseparable and mutually linked concomitants, the accent falling on their connection rather than their separation.³³

Whereas textual evidence supporting section 1.1 can be found in Avicenna, with the provisos noted above, the case of part 2 is very different, since the correspondence with Avicenna there is fragmentary and incomplete. Section 2.1 is a *reductio ad absurdum*, made of a premise and a consequence, with the conclusion left unexpressed. Since the premise of the *reductio* is ‘if “one” and “existent” signify a single notion/item’, the unexpressed conclusion should be that ‘one’ and ‘existent’ do not signify a single notion/item. Of this elliptical *reductio ad absurdum*, only the premise has a rough correspondence in Avicenna: it vaguely resembles the premise of a *reductio ad absurdum* that we find in a passage of *Ilāhiyyāt* VII.1 (p. 303, vv. 9–10 [p. 349, vv. 15–17]). But the consequence in

(although “thing” isn’t but an “existent”), as there is a distinction [*farq*] between an entity [*amr*] and its inseparable concomitant [*lāzim*]’ (cf. VIII.4, p. 346, v. 15–p. 347, v. 2 [p. 401, vv. 33–36]).

30 Ibid., I.5, p. 32, v. 3 [p. 36, v. 81]: ‘the notion of “existent” always accompanies it [i.e. the notion of “thing”, which signifies the essence] inseparably [*yalzamuhū*] it’; p. 34, vv. 9–10 [p. 39, vv. 37–39]: ‘Now you have understood in what [the concept of] “thing” differs from the concept of “existent” and of “supervening”, even though [“thing” and “existent”] accompany inseparably each other [*mutalāzimāni*]’ (cf. VI.5, p. 292, v. 3 [p. 336, v. 87]; VIII.4, pp. 347, 2 [pp. 401, 36]). Other notions that Avicenna uses in the *Ilāhiyyāt* to express the relation of existence and unity with essence are ‘supervenience’ (verb *dakhala ‘alā*), and — as we have seen — ‘joining’ (verb *iqtarana*), ‘consequence’ (verb *laḥiqa*), and ‘accidental occurrence’ (verb *‘araḍa*). Within the discussions of the relationship of essence and existence, the verbs *dakhala ‘alā* (I.7, p. 45, vv. 10–11 [p. 52, vv. 94–95]) and *‘araḍa* (VIII.4, p. 346, v. 13 [om.]) and are always used in conjunction with *lazima*. The verb *laḥiqa* is semantically close to *lazima*.

31 See, for example, *ibid.*, III.2, p. 103, v. 9 [p. 114, vv. 19–20], in Table 1.

32 Wisnovsky, ‘Essence and Existence’, p. 29. At p. 42, n. 43, Wisnovsky points to Bahmanyar’s (d. c. 1066) adoption of the Avicennian idea that existence and unity relate to the essence ‘from outside’ (*min khārij*). Wisnovsky also documents that the view of existence as superadded to essence is attributed by al-Suhrawardī (d. 1191) to the followers of the Peripatetics, and recurs in Fakhraddīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210).

33 See Bertolacci, ‘Distinction of Essence and Existence’, in which I have also argued that for Avicenna, ‘existent’ has both conceptual and extensional priority over ‘thing’ and the essence.

Avicenna's original text is different: in *Ilāhiyyāt* VII.1, from the assumption (regarded by Avicenna as wrong) that 'existent' and 'one' have the same concept, the false consequence follows that 'many' is not 'existent', as it is not, strictly speaking, 'one'. In Averroes's report, on the other hand, from the assumption that 'one' and 'existent' signify the same notion or item, it follows that a statement like 'existent is one' is non-informative and similar to a tautology. The actual consequence of the *reductio ad absurdum* in 2.1 remotely echoes another passage of the *Ilāhiyyāt* (I.5, p. 31, v. 10–p. 32, v. 2). There, from the assumption (taken by Avicenna as right) that 'essence' and 'thing' convey similar meanings, the correct consequence follows that a statement like 'the essence is a thing' is non-informative.³⁴ It is not too far-fetched to maintain that Averroes is somehow conflating these two distinct texts of Avicenna and that this reading results in a misreport of both.

More importantly, neither the imperfection of Avicenna's argument that Averroes underscores in section 2.2.1, nor the ignorance of the fundamental distinction that he imputes to Avicenna in section 2.3, is supported by any explicit text of Avicenna's. On the contrary, Avicenna's actual statements seem to invalidate both points. In the same passage of *Ilāhiyyāt* VII.1 on which Averroes models his report of Avicenna's argument in 2.1, Avicenna makes it clear (p. 303, vv. 9–10) that the *reductio ad absurdum* he proposes is valid only if the concepts of 'existent' and 'one' are the same 'in every way' (*min kulli jiha*), using the same term 'way' (*jiha*) that Averroes, too, employs in 2.2.1. Thus, the distinction of the 'concept' (*mafḥūm*) of 'existent' and 'one' and their 'way' of predication in Avicenna's text does not turn out to be dissimilar from the distinction of 'notion/item' and 'way' that Averroes introduces in his emendation of Avicenna's argument.³⁵ This being the case, it seems difficult to accuse Avicenna, as Averroes does in 2.3, of neglecting the distinction between the expressions that signify different modes

34 In *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.5, p. 31, v. 10–p. 32, v. 2 [p. 35, v. 62–p. 36, v. 79], Avicenna supports the distinction of essence and existence by pointing to the fact that the sentence 'the essence so-and-so is existent' is informative, which attests that 'essence' and 'existent' are not synonymous and are therefore conceptually distinct. To corroborate *e converso* this point, he shows that when two terms are identical or synonymous, a sentence in which the one is subject and the other predicate is non-informative. As an example of 'useless redundancy of speech' (*ḥaṣh min al-kalām ghayr muḥīd*, p. 31, vv. 13–14), he mentions the non-informative tautologies 'the essence so-and-so is an essence so-and-so' and 'the essence so-and-so is an essence'. Immediately afterwards (p. 31, vv. 14–17), as an example of 'speech that does not inform about what is not [yet] known', he provides the two non-informative non-tautological sentences: 'the essence so-and-so is a thing' and 'the essence is a thing': despite being non-tautological in so far as the subject is different from the predicate, these two sentences are nonetheless non-informative due to the synonymous relation of 'essence' and 'thing'. In the passage in question, Averroes seems to apply this same kind of reasoning to 'existent' and 'one', and to have in mind the non-informative tautological sentences 'existent is existent' and 'one is one' and the non-informative non-tautological sentence 'existent is one'. However, none of the statements reported by Averroes is mentioned by Avicenna in this passage of I.5.

35 The preceding lines of *Ilāhiyyāt*, VII.1, are: 'everything that is said "existent" in one respect can be said "one" in [another] respect' (p. 303, v. 7 [p. 349, vv. 10–12]). The different 'respect' (*ʿtibār*) by means of which 'existent' and 'one' are predicated of things looks equivalent to the term 'concept' in the passage just recalled.

of an essence and the expressions that signify attributes added to an essence. In a passage like *Ilāhiyyāt* VII.1, Avicenna appears to be quite aware that ‘existent’ and ‘one’, regardless of their relation with essence, are not only associated with different concepts, but also predicated in different ways. In other words, Averroes does not seem justified in denouncing the absence in Avicenna’s ontology of a theory of the modes of signification, at least as far as ‘existent’ and ‘one’ are concerned.

As to part 3, Averroes is certainly entitled to ascribe to Avicenna the doctrine of the accidentality of unity, since Avicenna often speaks of unity (and of number) as an ‘accident’ (*‘araḍ*), due to the intimate connection of unity with the accidental category of quantity and despite the doctrinal tensions that this teaching introduces into his metaphysical system.³⁶ But part 3, coming after and being closely linked with the previous two parts, suggests that, for Avicenna, ‘existent’ is also an accident in the same sense as ‘one’ is. This suggested implication looks unwarranted, however: in the few cases in which Avicenna portrays existence as an accident of essence,³⁷ he appears to have in mind a logical notion of accident, namely the fact that existence is not part of a thing’s essence, rather than a metaphysical notion, namely existence as an adventitious and unstable component of an existing thing.³⁸

Among the three parts of our text, part 2 is obviously crucial in so far as it is the most problematic. On the one hand, it deals comprehensively with different issues (issue A, the mutual relationship of ‘existent’ and ‘one’, in sections 2.1 and 2.2.1; issue B, the relationship of ‘existent’ and ‘one’ with essence, in sections 2.2.2, 2.2.3, and 2.3). On the other, it is perplexing for several reasons. It is incongruous with the preceding part 1.1, which deals only with issue B. It misreports Avicenna’s thought, ascribing to him in sections 2.1 and 2.3 arguments

36 Pickavé, ‘On the Latin Reception’, p. 344, remarks that Averroes’s ascription to Avicenna of the accidentality of unity is incompatible with Avicenna’s doctrine of individuation by means of non-accidental features (since individuality is a kind of unity, if unity is accidental, also individuality must be so). In my opinion, the incongruence that Pickavé signals has underpinnings in Avicenna’s own thought, and does not totally depend on Averroes’s report of it.

37 This happens in a single chapter of the work (VIII.4), in two consecutive passages (VIII.4, p. 346, v. 13 [om.]; p. 347, v. 9 [p. 402, vv. 45–46]) in which Avicenna employs first the participle *‘arīd* and then the verb *‘araḍa* to portray the relationship of existence (‘that-ness’, *‘annīyya*) and essence (‘quiddity’, *māhiyya*). The first of these two passages, however, is omitted by many Arabic testimonies and by the Latin translation. See Bertolacci, ‘God’s Existence and Essence’. On the second passage, see Table 1.

38 This is confirmed by Avicenna’s joint use of the roots *‘-r-d* and *l-z-m* in these passages. For terms stemming from the root *l-z-m* in these contexts, see VIII.4, p. 346, v. 13 [om.]; p. 347, v. 2 [p. 401, v. 36]. More generally, also independently of the relationship of essence and existence, Avicenna often uses terms stemming from the root *‘-r-d* in conjunction with terms stemming from the root *l-z-m* (see III.3, p. 109, v. 10 [p. 121, vv. 51–52]; V.1, p. 201, v. 9 [p. 233, v. 38]; V.1, p. 203, vv. 12–14 [p. 235, vv. 86–90]). The term ‘accidental’ (*‘araḍi*), instead of ‘accident’, that Avicenna uses in one notable case also for unity (III.3, p. 109, v. 10 [p. 121, vv. 51–52]; see Table 1) may suggest that the same idea is also lurking behind Avicenna’s conception of the relationship of ‘one’ and essence, despite his many statements maintaining that unity possesses the status of simple accident.

or errors in which Avicenna actually does not engage. In so far as it contends that, for Avicenna, ‘existent’ and ‘one’ do not signify the same item, it *prima facie* prevents part 3 — which argues that for Avicenna ‘one’ is an accident — from fully supporting part 1.1, which argues that for Avicenna *both* ‘existent’ *and* ‘one’ signify an accident.

Averroes’s criticism of Avicenna is a resolute disavowal of what Averroes asserts to be Avicenna’s doctrine of the transcendentals ‘existent’ and ‘one’. Attacking what is arguably the fundamental metaphysical doctrine of Avicenna, in Averroes’s intention this criticism indicates that the entire metaphysics of Avicenna is flawed. Not by chance, the criticism is placed emphatically at the beginning of what Averroes regards as the expository part of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (namely Book Γ), after the preliminary and previous dialectical books, in order to reassess the Stagirite’s original thought against Avicenna’s erroneous innovations and deformations.³⁹

Albert does not share the same polemical attitude. On the contrary, he builds upon Averroes’s text an *excusatio* of Avicenna and a harmonization of the views of the two Arabic philosophers. To this end, he makes part 2 the cornerstone of his citation of Averroes’s passage, aware of the key role that this part plays in Averroes’s account of Avicenna and arguably also of the problems that it raises. There are good reasons to believe that Albert makes this part of Averroes’s text pivotal in his own quotation of the Commentator because it is the only part of Averroes’s criticism in which issue A is taken into account: Albert knows by direct acquaintance with Avicenna’s *Philosophia prima* that on issue A, despite Averroes’s accusations, Avicenna’s position is fundamentally congruent with Averroes’s standpoint.

Albert’s Solution: Between Averroes and Avicenna

Table 2 displays digression IV.1.5 of Albert’s commentary, and compares it with its main sources in Averroes, Avicenna, and the *Liber de causis*.⁴⁰ Terms or expressions that are identical in Albert and his sources are reported in bold; further points that are similar, though not identical, in terminology or doctrine are underlined. The most significant additions or changes introduced by Albert vis-à-vis Averroes are indicated by italics.

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- ³⁹ A shorter criticism of Avicenna on a related topic is added by Averroes later in the same section of the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*: it is a refutation of Avicenna’s view of unity as a non-essential feature (Γ.3, p. 315, vv. 3–9 [fol. 67G]). Although related to the criticism considered here, this reference to Avicenna constitutes an independent criticism (see note 14 above), and is not quoted by Albert in the digression IV.1.5.
- ⁴⁰ At the beginning of his commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*, Albert explains the purpose of digressions. Digressions are those chapters of his Aristotelian commentaries in which Albert does not analyse Aristotle’s text, but either resolves a doubt or fills a doctrinal gap concerning a text previously commented upon (*Physica*, I.1.1, ed. by Hossfeld, p. 1, vv. 27–30).

The digression is appended to the preceding chapter (IV.1.4), in which Albert explains *Metaph.* Γ.2, 1003b22–36, the same passage commented upon by Averroes in the section of his commentary where he places the criticism of Avicenna just analysed (see above, Text 1). In that passage, according to Albert, Aristotle holds, in short, that ‘being’ and ‘one’ are the same thing and a unique nature (‘ergo ens et unum sunt idem sive una et eadem natura’) since they follow each other, although they bear different names.⁴¹ In other words, Albert sees Aristotle’s text as dealing primarily with issue A, and issues B and C as ancillary to issue A.⁴² The digression under consideration, accordingly, concerns issue A, as is clear from its title and introduction, and aims to defend the correct view of issue A against its proposed denial (‘solutionem rationum sophistarum inductarum ad hoc quod ens et unum non sint natura una et eadem’; ‘an unum et ens consequuntur se ad invicem sicut unam et eandem rem et naturam significantia’). The other two issues (B and C), and in particular issue B, are intentionally left outside the scope of the digression. This is a fundamental strategic move on Albert’s part, for it is on issue A that Albert will be able to construe a consensus between Avicenna and Averroes.

The digression is formally structured as a *quaestio*. After stating in the introduction the topic to be discussed, Albert reports seven arguments attributed to Avicenna (Contra 1–7), by means of which Avicenna allegedly intended to prove that ‘being’ and ‘one’ do *not* signify the same nature. Afterwards, in a sort of *responsio*, Albert opposes his personal opinion to these arguments, according to which Aristotle is right in positing that ‘being’ and ‘one’ signify the same nature. Finally, Albert refutes each of the arguments attributed to Avicenna (Ad Contra 1–7). The digression ends with a short conclusion restating the main result of the previous chapter.

41 Albertus Magnus, *In Metaph.*, IV.1.4, p. 166, vv. 57–58.

42 That the substance of everything is essentially ‘being’ and ‘one’ (*Metaph.* Γ.2, 1003b32–33) is, according to Albert, part of the proof of the main thesis announced in 1003b22–32 (see *In Metaph.*, IV.1.4, p. 166, vv. 40–58). Albert regards Aristotle’s further statement, that the species of ‘being’ are as numerous as the species of ‘one’ (1003b33–36), as a corollary of the main thesis (*In Metaph.*, IV.1.4, p. 166, vv. 59–66). Issue B is only obliquely hinted at in Albert’s formulation of Aristotle’s main thesis (*In Metaph.*, IV.1.4, p. 165, vv. 38–39).

Table 2. Albert the Great, *Metaphysica*, digression IV.1.5: Conspectus of Sources.

ALBERT, <i>IN METAPH.</i> , IV.1.5, P. 166, V. 67– P. 167, V. 72	SOURCES
<p>[Titulus] Et est digressio declarans solutionem rationum sophistarum inductarum ad hoc quod ens et unum non sint natura una et eadem</p>	
<p>[Introductio] Dubitabit autem aliquis de inductis, an unum et ens consequuntur se ad invicem sicut unam et eandem rem et naturam significantia.</p>	<p>Averroes, <i>Long Commentary on the Metaphysics</i> Γ.3, Lat. trans. as in <i>Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis</i>, ed. Venetiis 1562, vol. 8, pp. 67B–E</p> <p>[1.1] 67B: Avicenna autem peccavit multum in hoc, quod existimavit, quod unum et ens significant dispositiones additas essentiae rei.</p> <p>[1.2] Et mirum est de isto homine, quomodo erravit tali errore [...]</p>
<p>[Contra 1] Obicit enim contra hoc AVICENNA <u>dicens, quod si unum et ens significant eandem</u> naturam, tunc ista nomina, unum et ens, sunt synonyma, et <u>est nugatio, quando unum alteri additur, cum dicitur ‘unum ens’.</u></p>	<p>[2.1] 67C: Et iste homo ratiocinatur ad suam opinionem, <u>dicendo quod, si unum et ens significant idem, tunc dicere ens est unum esset nugatio</u>, quasi dicere unum est unum, aut ens est ens. [...]</p>
<p>[Contra 2] Amplius, cum dicitur ‘unum ens’, haec duo nomina non⁴³ iunguntur sibi per appositionem, sicut cum dicitur ‘animal homo’, quia unum non determinat alterum. Videtur igitur, quod unum iungatur enti per <u>denominationem</u> et informationem; hoc enim videtur ex hoc quod numerum et suppositum trahit ab ente sicut denominans a denominato et adiectivum a substantivo. Omne autem denominativum formam quandam aliam ponit super denominatum. <i>Unum ergo dicit aliquam formam enti additam, cum dicitur ‘unum ens’.</i></p>	<p>[3.1] 67D: Et fecerunt errare illum hominem res, quarum quaedam est, quia innuit hoc nomen unum de genere nominum <u>denominativorum</u>, et ista nomina significant accidens, et substantiam.</p>
<p>[Contra 3] Amplius, unum dicit <u>indivisionem</u>, quam non dicit ens, et cum dicitur ‘unum ens’, <u>indivisionem</u> ponit unum super ens; <i>addit igitur aliquid enti.</i></p>	<p>[3.2] 67D: Et etiam, quia existimavit, quod hoc nomen unum significat intentionem in re <u>carente divisibilitate</u>, et quod illa intentio est alia ab intentione, quae est natura illius rei.</p>
<p>[Contra 4] Amplius, unum principium est numeri. Sicut igitur punctus est naturae continui, licet non sit continuum, ita unum est</p>	<p>[3.3.1] 67D–E: Et etiam, quia existimavit, quod unum dictum de omnibus praedicamentis, est illud unum, quod est</p>

ALBERT, *IN METAPH.*, IV.1.5, P. 166, V. 67–
P. 167, V. 72

SOURCES

naturae numeri, licet non sit numerus; est igitur **unum accidens**. *Cum igitur dicitur 'unum ens', addit unum quoddam accidens super ens.*

[Contra 5] Adhuc, [...] ens solum est creatum; unum autem est per informationem, quia suum intellectum ponit circa ens praesuppositum; est enim unum ens indivisum; *ergo aliquid addit super ens.*

[Contra 6] Amplius, omne dividens aliquid addit super divisum; unum autem cum multo sibi opposito dividit ens; *ergo addit aliquid enti.*

[Contra 7] Amplius, si ens et unum sunt penitus una et eadem natura, quidquid opponitur uni, opponitur et alteri; multum autem opponitur uni; ergo opponitur et enti, quod falsum est; *ergo ens et unum non sunt penitus una natura et eadem.*

Haec et similia inducit AVICENNA pro se, quando contradicit Aristoteli in supra inductis rationibus.

[Responsio] Quia autem superius inductae rationes [sc. rationes Aristotelis] sunt irrefragabiles, revertemur dicentes, quod ens et unum sunt una et eadem natura [...]

[Ad Contra 1] Modus igitur diversus importatus per ens et unum facit, quod nomina non sunt synonyma nec est nugatio, quando sibi iunguntur, nec per appositionem iunguntur sibi.

[Ad Contra 2] Et licet unum ponat modum suum, quem importat circa ens sicut circa suppositum suum, tamen modus ille non est alicuius formae alterius ab ente, sed modus

principium numerorum. Numerus autem est accidens. Unde opinatus fuit iste, quod hoc nomen **unum** significat **accidens** in entibus; [...]

Cf. *Liber de causis*, IV.37, p. 142, vv. 37–38 (prima rerum creatarum est esse et non est ante ipsum creatum aliud); XVII (XVIII). 148, p. 174, vv. 57–61 (vita autem prima dat eis quae sunt sub ea vitam non per modum creationis immo per modum formae. et similiter intelligentia non dat eis quae sunt sub ea de scientia et reliquis rebus nisi per modum formae); XXXI (XXXII).219, p. 202, vv. 12–13 (omnis unitas post unum verum est acquisita)

Cf. Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia prima*, I.2, p. 13, vv. 16–17 [p. 13, vv. 42–43]: Et ex his quaedam sunt ei quasi accidentia propria, sicut unum et multum.

Cf. Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia prima*, VII.1, p. 303, vv. 9–10 [p. 349, vv. 15–17]: Si enim id quod intelligitur de uno omnino [*min kulli jiha*] esset id quod intelligitur per ens, tunc multum, secundum quod est multum, non esset ens sicut non est unum.

[2.2.1] 67C: Et hoc non sequeretur, nisi diceremus, quod dicere de aliquo quod est ens et unum, quod significant eandem intentionem et eodem modo.

Cf. [2.2.2] 67C: Nos autem diximus, quod significant eandem essentiam, sed modis diversis, non dispositiones diversas essentiae additas.

ALBERT, IN *METAPH.*, IV.1.5, P. 166, V. 67– P. 167, V. 72 SOURCES

negationis, qui sufficit grammatico. Et ideo non est denominativum, sed modum habens denominativi.

Et hoc forte attendit AVICENNA, cum dixit esse denominativum.

[Ad Contra 3] Sic igitur licet indivisionem addat super ens et quoad hoc praesupponat ens, hoc tamen non est aliquam formam addere, sed potius modum, qui ex negatione resultat.

[Ad Contra 4] Quod autem dicitur, quod **unum est principium numeri**, dupliciter accipi potest propter aequivocationem principii [...] Et hoc modo duplex est unitas [...]

[Ad Contra 5] Ex dictis autem patet, qualiter unum sit factum per informationem et ens per creationem et qualiter unum consequitur ens.

[Ad Contra 6] Et ideo dividit ipsum et modum quendam addit ei,

[Ad Contra 7] gratia cuius opponitur multitudini, cui non opponitur ens. Et sic patet omnium praeinductorum solutio.

[Excusatio] Et facile est per haec quae hic dicta sunt, excusare dicta AVICENNAE, quia pro certo, si quis subtiliter dicta sua respiciat, dicere intendit hoc quod hic dictum est.

[Conclusio] Ex omnibus autem inductis hoc accipiendum est, quod ens et unum unam dicunt naturam, et ideo species unius sunt species entis. [...]

[3.3.2] 67E: et non intellexit, quod **unum**, quod **est principium numerorum**, est ex entibus, de quibus dicitur hoc nomen unum, licet sit magis dignum hoc [...]

Cf. Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia prima*, I.4, p. 26, vv. 17–18 [p. 30, v. 59]; III.2, p. 103, vv. 7–8 [p. 114, vv. 17–19]; VII.1, p. 303, vv. 6–9 [p. 349, vv. 9–15] (see below, Texts 2–4)

This digression is remarkable in many ways. Although he is not named in the title, Avicenna is its main focus, since, according to Albert, it is he who casts doubt on Aristotle’s doctrine by disagreeing with it (see Contra 1). He is the only author who is referred to by name, being mentioned four times throughout the digression, which thus includes almost one sixth of the twenty-six occurrences of the name ‘Avicenna’ in Albert’s commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Averroes, by

43 I read *non* with manuscript P: *non* is omitted in the edition.

contrast, despite being the main source of Albert's digression, is never mentioned by name. Albert's emphasis on Avicenna does not seem coincidental: it looks as though he wants to attract the reader's attention, signalling that something important is at stake regarding this Arabic master. What Albert does, in fact, is worth considering. In the first part of the digression, at the beginning and the end of the exposition of Avicenna's arguments, Albert introduces Avicenna as an adversary of Aristotle.⁴⁴ But contrary to expectation, in the third part of the digression, after refuting the arguments previously attributed to Avicenna, Albert does not emphasize Avicenna's error, but instead excuses Avicenna's arguments, showing the similarity between Avicenna's doctrine and the true Aristotelian position.⁴⁵ This ambivalent attitude, both anti-Avicennian and pro-Avicennian in one and the same text, is quite striking.

The twofold tenor of the digression has a double explanation. On the one hand (a), Albert reports its main source (the passage of Averroes's *Long Commentary on Metaph.* Γ discussed above) selectively and in a modified form, in a way that is quite lenient towards Avicenna's actual position; on the other (b), Albert has independent access to Avicenna's text, on the basis of which he is able to evaluate whether and to what extent Averroes's report of Avicenna's position is faithful or distorting.

(a) Albert takes the first four arguments of Avicenna (*Contra* 1–4), as well as the basic elements of the answer to them (*Ad Contra* 1–4), from parts 2–3 of Averroes's text. The sequence of the arguments is exactly the same in Averroes and Albert, and the general structure of the two texts is largely similar.⁴⁶ Albert himself constructs the subsequent three arguments of Avicenna (*Contra* 5–7) along the lines of the first four, drawing freely on Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*,⁴⁷ as well as from some propositions of the *Liber de causis*.⁴⁸

44 'Obicit enim contra hoc Avicenna dicens, quod' (beginning of *Contra* 1); 'Haec et similia inducit Avicenna pro se, quando contradicit Aristoteli in supra inductis rationibus' (end of *Contra* 7).

45 At the end of *Ad Contra* 2, the refutation of the second argument attributed to Avicenna closes as follows: 'Et hoc forte attendit Avicenna, cum dixit [sc. unum] esse denominativum'. Likewise, after *Ad Contra* 7, at the end of the refutation of all the arguments attributed to Avicenna, the excusatio appears to be an apology for and total rehabilitation of Avicenna's doctrine: 'Et sic patet omnium praeinductorum solutio. Et facile est per haec quae hic dicta sunt, excusare dicta Avicennae, quia pro certo, si quis subtiliter dicta sua respiciat, dicere intendit hoc quod hic dictum est'.

46 Albert does not reproduce sections 2.2, 2.3, and 3.3.2 in the first part of the digression immediately after 2.1 and 3.3.1, as in Averroes, but uses 2.2 and 3.3.2 in the answer to the single arguments in the third part of the digression. The close correspondence between the parts of Averroes's text and the arguments attributed to Avicenna by Albert proves that Albert drew upon Averroes's text while writing the digression.

47 Despite the presence of the expression 'unum et idem' in Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*, VII.1, ed. by Van Riet, p. 303, v. 8 [p. 349, v. 13], Albert's expression 'una et eadem natura' in *Contra* 7, p. 167, vv. 10–11 and 14, comes from 'idem et una natura' in the *Translatio media* of *Metaph.* 1003b22, an expression that Albert uses also in *In Metaph.*, IV.1.4, p. 166, vv. 57–58.

48 Latin text in *Liber de causis*, ed. by Pattin. On the connection that Albert sees between the theological part of Avicenna's metaphysics (treatises VIII–X.3) and the content of the *Liber de causis*, see

However, Albert substantially modifies the content of Averroes's text, in three main ways. First, Albert completely omits part 1, as well as all the sections of part 2 (2.2.2, 2.2.3, and 2.3) that — like part 1 — deal with issue B, that is to say, with the relationship of 'existent' and 'one' with essence. He therefore quotes only section 2.1 of part 2 in its original place, and takes inspiration from section 2.2.1 in the *Ad Contra* 1 for the idea that 'existent' and 'one' are predicated of the same thing in different ways (*modus diversus*).⁴⁹ Second, he consequently shifts the balance of Averroes's report towards section 2.1 — Avicenna's view of the mutual relationship of 'existent' and 'one' (issue A) — as the initial and main element of Avicenna's position. Third, he rephrases part 3 (issue B₁) so as to bring it into agreement with section 2.1 (issue A) rather than leaving it congruent, within the limits seen above, with the omitted part 1 (issue B), as it is in Averroes.

The first change, the total exclusion of the sections of Averroes's report of Avicenna dealing with issue B, is, of course, especially important.⁵⁰ As we have seen, these sections are the only passages of Averroes's text in which Avicenna's doctrine of the relationship of essence and existence is attacked. Thus, by omitting them, Albert excludes Avicenna's distinction of essence and existence from the scope of his own criticism of Avicenna in digression IV.1.5. This might be a further instance of Albert's defence of Avicenna in the digression, this time silent or implicit,⁵¹ worth being considered in the analysis of Albert's attitude to Avicenna's view on essence and existence.⁵²

The second change is a consequence of the first. Because of the omission of part 1 of Averroes's text, section 2.1 comes to the forefront of Albert's report of Averroes's criticism of Avicenna. Albert quotes this section faithfully, almost verbatim. In it, Albert, like Averroes, deals with issue A of Aristotle, namely the mutual relationship between 'being' and 'one', a point that Albert stresses by adding to Averroes's text the formula *quando unum alteri additur* (in italics in Table 2).

As a third and final change, in the other part of Averroes's criticism that Albert quotes, namely part 3, the arguments that in Averroes's text support Avicenna's view that 'one' is added to essence (issue B₁) are changed by Albert in order to

Bertolacci, "Subtilius speculando", pp. 327–36. On his reception of the *Liber de causis*, see Krause and Anzulewicz, 'From Content to Method'.

- 49 The same idea is also present in section 2.2.2 of Averroes's criticism (issue B). Albert might have considered also this section, although he diverts the idea supposedly taken from it from issue B to issue A.
- 50 A similar emphasis on issue A rather than on issue B can be seen, in ways different from Albert's, in Roger Bacon and in the sophisma 'Tantum unum est' (see below, note 63).
- 51 Likewise, in the corresponding passage of his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Albert omits the criticism in which Averroes attacks Avicenna's doctrine that 'existent' and 'one' signify non-essential features of things (*Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* I.8, p. 1279, v. 12–p. 1280, v. 11 [fol. 257E–G]).
- 52 See Vargas, 'Albert on Being and Beings', p. 646. Other useful hints can be found in the other parts of the section 'Albert the Great on *Metaphysics*', ed. by Carasquillo, Twetten, and Tremblay.

support part 2.1 and issue A. In Albert's version (Contra 2–4), these arguments are rephrased to corroborate the view that 'one' is an addition to 'being': the quotation of each of these arguments ends with formulae, absent in Averroes, that stress the additional character of 'one' with respect to 'being' (in italics in Table 2).⁵³ Something similar happens with the subsequent three arguments (Contra 5–7), added from the *Liber de causis* and Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*.⁵⁴

Albert's *modus operandi* in the present case serves a double purpose. First, with regard to Averroes, by omitting some passages of Averroes's criticism of Avicenna and changing the content of others Albert recasts in a coherent setting the multifarious attack directed by the Commentator against Avicenna's doctrine of 'existent' and 'one'. Second, with regard to Avicenna, by focusing on part 2.1 of Averroes's text and on issue A, Albert drives the reader away from an element of Avicenna's metaphysics genuinely at variance with Aristotle's and Averroes's views, namely Avicenna's account of issue B, and directs attention instead to a doctrine — Avicenna's treatment of issue A — that is compatible with Aristotle's and Averroes's standpoint. By thus recasting the entire discussion under the umbrella of issue A, Albert neutralizes Averroes's criticism with respect to Avicenna's true position; at the same time, he makes Avicenna's true position excusable vis-à-vis Averroes's attack, which does not affect Avicenna's authentic standpoint, but only Averroes's own (mis)representation of it. In fact, Avicenna does not uphold the account of issue A that Averroes ascribes to him, and, as we have seen, advocates a view of it that is not contrary to Aristotle's and Averroes's.

(b) Significantly, the last argument that Albert ascribes to Avicenna in the first part of the digression (Contra 7) is taken directly from the passage of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima* (VII.1, p. 303, vv. 9–10 [p. 349, vv. 15–17]) that Averroes misreports in section 2.1 of his Long Commentary. Albert, in contrast, reports faithfully this passage by Avicenna, which he was evidently able to access independently of Averroes. We can therefore assume that Albert knew this passage first-hand, that he was able to evaluate the inaccuracy of Averroes's report of it, and possibly that he could even glimpse the presence in Avicenna's work of a theory of the different ways in which 'existent' and 'one' signify things.⁵⁵

Likewise, when Albert excuses Avicenna in the final part of the digression, he very probably has in mind a series of passages of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*

53 'Unum ergo dicit aliquam formam enti additam, cum dicitur "unum ens"' (Contra 2), etc.

54 See 'ergo [sc. unum] aliquid addit super ens' in Contra 5, and 'ergo addit aliquid enti' in Contra 6.

Contra 7 ends with 'ergo ens et unum non sunt penitus una natura et eadem', which still regards issue A.

55 The idea of a *modus diversus importatus per ens et unum* is no doubt the leitmotif of Albert's reply to the arguments attributed to Avicenna in the last part of the digression, starting with Ad Contra 1: in proposing this idea, Albert is certainly beholden to Averroes's own view (section 2.2.2 of Table 1). It looks likely, however, that the final *excusatio* of Avicenna also reflects Albert's awareness of the presence of this same idea in Avicenna. Although the *Philosophia prima* renders the crucial expression 'in every way' (*min kulli jiha*) in the Arabic text of *Ilāhiyyāt*, VII.1 rather vaguely as *omnino*, Albert had at his disposal other texts of Avicenna's work on the same point (see Texts 2–4).

where Avicenna repudiates the view according to which 'one' is subordinated to 'existent' and asserts their equality. These passages may be laid out as follows.

Texts 2–4: Avicenna, *Philosophia prima*

[2] I.4, p. 26, vv. 17–18 [p. 30, v. 59]: [...] unum parificatur ad esse.

[3] III.2, p. 103, vv. 7–8 [p. 114, vv. 17–19]: Unum autem parificatur ad esse, quia unum dicitur de unoquoque praedicamentorum, sicut ens, sed intellectus [mafhūm] eorum [...] diversus est.

[4] VII.1, p. 303, vv. 6–9 [p. 349, vv. 9–15]: Scias autem quod unum et ens iam parificantur in praedicatione sui de rebus [ashyā], ita quod, de quocumque dixeris quod est ens uno respectu [bi-tibār], illud potest esse unum alio respectu [bi-tibār]. Nam quicquid est, unum est, et ideo fortasse putatur quia id quod intelligitur [mafhūm] de utroque sit unum et idem, sed non est ita: sunt autem unum subiecto [bi-l-mawḍū], scilicet quia, in quocumque est hoc, est et illud.

The *parificatio* of 'one' and 'existent' stated in these passages is crucial to Avicenna's way of reshaping the structure of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in the *Ilāhiyyāt*. It is the basis of Avicenna's framing of metaphysics as a science that deals, at the same time and at equivalent levels, with both 'existent' and 'one', being epistemologically both an ontology and a henology.⁵⁶ These texts were in all likelihood very familiar to Albert.⁵⁷ In particular, he must have been acquainted with the longest and most informative of them (Text 4), since this text immediately precedes the passage of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima* that Albert reports in *Contra* 7. In these texts of the *Philosophia prima*, Avicenna denies that 'one' adds something real to 'existent'. According to Avicenna, 'existent' and 'one' are coextensional and bear two totally distinct concepts, along the lines of the conceptual distinction also admitted by Aristotle, Averroes, and Albert.

On the basis of the evidence that the *Philosophia prima* gives him, Albert takes Avicenna's conception of the mutual relationship of 'existent' and 'one' to be analogous to the doctrine of Aristotle in *Metaph.* Γ.2, endorsed also by Averroes and by Albert himself in their commentaries on *Metaphysics*. Consequently, Albert can excuse Avicenna from Averroes's attack in the last part of the digression.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The relevance of these texts is discussed in Bertolacci, 'The Structure of Metaphysical Science'; Bertolacci, *Reception of Aristotle's 'Metaphysics'*, chap. 6.

⁵⁷ This does not mean, of course, that Albert endorses every single point of Avicenna's position. In *In Metaph.*, IV.1.4, p. 165, vv. 38–39, for example, he seems to reject that *ens* and *unum* are simply the same according to subject, contrary to what Avicenna's Text 4 asserts.

⁵⁸ Avicenna says that 'existent' and 'one' are predicated of the same set of things, or the same subjects, according to a different concept (*conceptus, id quod intelligitur*; Ar. *mafhūm*) or respect (*respectus*; Ar. *ītibār*; see Texts 3–4). Besides the conceptual distinction, he also takes into account, albeit obliquely, the presence of a different 'way' (Ar. *jīha*) of signification (VII.1, p. 303, vv. 9–10 [p. 349, vv. 15–17]; see Table 2). It is not clear whether the terms 'concept' and 'respect' in these texts are synonymous, or whether the latter term is closer in meaning to 'way'. What is sufficiently clear is that Albert considers

To sum up: On the relationship between ‘being’, ‘one’, and essence (issue B), Averroes criticizes an aspect of Avicenna’s philosophy that can be regarded as non-Aristotelian or anti-Aristotelian, since Avicenna contends, contrary to Aristotle, that ‘existent’ and ‘one’ are distinct from essence (the former is distinct but inseparably connected with essence; the latter is said to be an accident). Aristotle, by contrast, in the passage of *Metaph.* Γ.2 (1003b32–33) commented upon by Averroes and Albert (Text 1 above), affirms that the substance or essence of a thing is ‘one’ and ‘being’ not accidentally, that is, essentially.⁵⁹ Albert arguably sides with Averroes against Avicenna on issue B.⁶⁰ On the mutual relationship of ‘being’ and ‘one’ (issue A), however, Averroes’s criticism of Avicenna appears pointless to Albert, since Albert knows that Avicenna holds that ‘existent’ and ‘one’ signify the same thing in different ways, and that ‘one’ adds nothing real to ‘existent’; in other words, Albert is aware that Avicenna agrees with Aristotle and Averroes in regarding ‘being’ as different from ‘one’ not in reality, but only conceptually. Sure of Avicenna’s real position, and by shifting the target of Averroes’s criticism of Avicenna from issue B to issue A, Albert paves the way for his apology for Avicenna in the final part of the digression.⁶¹ By excusing Avicenna, as well as by avoiding any mention of Averroes in the digression, Albert portrays the contrast between Averroes and Avicenna much less harshly than Averroes does in his *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*. In his own commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Albert never mentions Avicenna again as holder of a doctrine of transcendentals criticized by Averroes.

the difference in concept, respect, or way that Avicenna affirms between ‘existent’ and ‘one’ to be remarkably similar to the difference in the way of signifying that Averroes accuses him of neglecting.

- 59 I do not take into account here whether a distinction of essence and existence is envisaged by Aristotle himself in other loci of the *Corpus*, as in the famous distinction of the questions ‘what it is’ and ‘if it is’ in the *Posterior Analytics*, or in the polarity between the universality of essence and the individuality of existence in the *Metaphysics* (the notorious issue of whether Aristotle regards the essence as individual or universal in the *Metaphysics* is fiercely debated). Castelli, *Problems and Paradigms of Unity*, contends that in *Metaph.* Γ.2, 1003b32–33, ‘the basic idea is that the essence of each being is one and a certain being primitively and not by accident’ (p. 66; see also pp. 208 and 266).
- 60 The criticism of Avicenna in Averroes’s *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* (Γ.3, p. 315, vv. 3–9 [fol. 67G]) that follows the one discussed here concerns Avicenna’s doctrine of the extrinsic relationship of unity to essence. Its purport is summarized by Albert in the chapter preceding the digression (*In Metaph.*, IV.1.4, p. 166, vv. 40–53); Albert cites this criticism silently, however, without any reference to either Avicenna or Averroes. In this case, Albert seems to endorse Averroes’s critical stance without openly reproaching Avicenna.
- 61 The *excusatio* of Avicenna at the end may be one of the reasons why the title of the digression does not ascribe the error in question to Avicenna, but generally to some sophists (*sophistae*). Likewise, when Albert subsequently refers to the present digression (*In Metaph.*, X.1.5, p. 437, vv. 33–34), he replaces the four explicit mentions of Avicenna here by a single and more vague reference to *quidam*. The occasion of this retrospective reference is Albert’s report of another criticism by Averroes against Avicenna’s doctrine of transcendentals (*Long Commentary on the Metaphysics, Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII*, I.5, p. 1267, v. 15–p. 1268, v. 3 [fol. 255B]).

Conclusion

De Libera rightly remarks that Albert's defence of Avicenna in our digression is due to an intention 'de rectifier une lecture étroite ou incorrecte de la lettre du texte avicennien'.⁶² In this paper, I have argued that the 'reading of Avicenna' against which Albert reacts is the one proposed by Averroes in the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*. Averroes's interpretation of Avicenna is 'narrow or incorrect' because Averroes's account is neither coherent, insofar as he ascribes to Avicenna contrasting doctrines, nor well grounded, insofar as he presents as Avicennian a doctrine that Avicenna in fact does not uphold. Albert seems to be somehow aware of these shortcomings. He 'rectifies' Averroes's account of Avicenna's position by excusing Avicenna for the thesis that Averroes erroneously ascribes to him.

It seems sufficiently clear that Albert builds this digression directly upon Averroes's *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* and integrates it with recourse to Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*, two works whose Latin translations he reads, in this as in other cases, first-hand and without mediation.⁶³ In fact, the present digression is the only case of a quotation of Avicenna in Albert's commentary on the *Metaphysics*, which is partially taken from another source (that is, Averroes), and not directly from the Latin translations of Avicenna's works.⁶⁴

Although exceptional in many ways, the present digression can be taken as emblematic of Albert's more general attitude towards Arabic metaphysics in his commentary on the *Metaphysics*. In other instances of controversy between Averroes and Avicenna over metaphysical issues as well, Albert frequently seeks a harmonization that can minimize the points of dissent and reconcile, as far as possible, the contrasting positions of his two Arabic sources. More visibly in the digression I have discussed than in the rest of the commentary, Albert strives to smooth out the incompatibility between those positions. In all these regards, his aim is to rework Averroes's and Avicenna's metaphysical writings in order to create a unified and coherent system of Arabic Peripatetic metaphysics that can serve as a non-controversial tool for an insightful interpretation of Aristotle.⁶⁵

62 De Libera, 'D'Avicenne à Averroès, et retour', p. 155.

63 It would be difficult to explain otherwise either the changes that he introduces into Averroes's criticism or the final *excusatio* of Avicenna. The joint presence of a criticism of Avicenna and of a defence of him in the digression is very likely the fruit of Albert's direct recourse to the Latin translations of Averroes's and Avicenna's texts, rather than a borrowing from an intermediate source. In this context, one may notice that the four *rationes* ascribed to Avicenna in the anonymous sophisma 'Tantum unum est' (MS Paris, BNF, Lat. 16135; see de Libera, 'D'Avicenne à Averroès, et retour', pp. 156–57) are only partially similar to the ones proposed by Albert as Contra 1–4. The same holds true of four arguments that 'one' and 'being' are not the same and do not signify the same item in Roger Bacon (de Libera, 'D'Avicenne à Averroès, et retour', pp. 150–51). In Bacon, moreover, these arguments are not ascribed to Avicenna, but remain anonymous.

64 See Bertolacci, "Subtilius speculando", pp. 297–300.

65 See Mulchahey, 'First the Bow Is Bent in Study...'

As shown by the cases of Porphyry and al-Kindī with respect to Plato and Aristotle, the need for philosophical consistency is felt especially urgently in periods of crisis and transformation, involving changes in the milieu within which philosophy is practised in a given culture or the introduction of the discipline into a foreign culture. Albert did something analogous with respect to Avicenna and Averroes in a further step in the history of philosophy. The thirteenth century was a crucial period of this kind, as the ‘new’ Aristotle entered Latin culture for the first time, through and together with Arabic *falsafa*, triggering the resistance of traditional Latin philosophy to a foreign world view that was rooted in a pagan master, Aristotle, and intimately linked to a ‘heretic’ religion, Islam. Albert seems to be perfectly aware that his endorsement of Arabic philosophy creates an unbridgeable gap between his own interpretation of Aristotle and that of previous and contemporary Latin philosophers, who were still unaware of — or consciously hostile to — Arabic sources. In the specific case of the *Metaphysics*, he reacted to such reactionary tendencies by striving for philosophical congruence between Avicenna and Averroes, as the two main Arabic interpreters of Aristotle’s work. Thus, the philosophical enterprise for which Albert is famous is possibly not only ‘to make Aristotle intelligible to Latin readers,’ but also to make Arabic philosophy, especially metaphysics, acceptable to Latin culture.

Albert’s digression is revealing in another respect as well: it marks the transition from a first phase of Albert’s attitude towards Arabic philosophy, in which Avicenna is still an established philosophical authority to be defended against the *novitas* of Averroes, to a second phase, in which Averroes has gained the status of the most authoritative commentator on Aristotle. The shift reverberates in the institutional contexts of the time, where, on the one hand, Avicenna’s philosophy was the essential element of the theologians’ aspiration of integrating philosophy into theology, and, on the other, Averroes’s interpretation of the Stagirite was the quintessence of the Arts masters’ aim of making philosophy an independent discipline. The digression analysed in this paper partakes in both phases. It retains traces of the first phase insofar as it contains the only explicit apology for Avicenna against Averroes to be found in Albert’s commentary on the *Metaphysics*, as opposed to the numerous such apologies in Albert’s previous commentaries on Aristotle. It reflects the second phase insofar as Averroes’s commentary emerges as a true ‘companion’ to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, providing not only a full-fledged understanding of Aristotle’s text, but also a glimpse of Avicenna’s teachings on key metaphysical doctrines by means of his criticisms.⁶⁶

66 I have documented how Albert’s defence of Avicenna against Averroes’s attacks changes throughout his commentaries on Aristotle in Bertolacci, “Averroes ubique Avicennam persequitur”.

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