

# IBN SĪNĀ'S ARISTOTLE

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## *Abstract*

Ibn Sīnā's reading of Aristotle is that of an Arabic and Neoplatonized Aristotle, but, above all, critical, as the two commentaries of his *Kitāb al-Insāf*, i.e., on *Lambda* 6-10 and the *pseudo-Theology*, show. Ibn Sīnā read Aristotle's works only in Arabic translation and was therefore influenced by their very wording. However, as his commentary on *Lambda* 6-10 shows, he looked at different translations, or even indirect testimonies, as e.g. Themistius' paraphrase. Moreover, Ibn Sīnā offers a Neoplatonic inspired interpretation of Aristotle's metaphysics, especially its theology. Such Neoplatonic reading is almost natural if one, as he does, considers the *Theology*, which mainly offers a paraphrase of Plotinus' *Enneads* IV-VI, as a genuine Aristotelian work, even if Ibn Sīnā suspects a manipulation of the text by dishonest people, in all likelihood some Isma'ilites. Eventually, Ibn Sīnā, despite his great reference for Aristotle, detects some flaws in the latter's thinking, or, at least, in its very wording. All in all, Ibn Sīnā reveals to be a critical commentator, who considered Aristotle as the father, or even Godfather, of philosophy, but who nevertheless placed the search for truth above all.

## *Key Words*

Ibn Sīnā, Aristotle, Neoplatonism.



Gutas, in his seminal book *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian tradition*, has already outlined important aspects of Ibn Sīnā's attitude toward Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> He stresses in chapter four, where he presents Ibn Sīnā's conception of the history of

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<sup>1</sup> Dimitri Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to Reading Ibn Sīnā's Philosophical Works*. Second, Revised and Enlarged Edition, Including an Inventory of Ibn Sīnā's Authentic Works, (IPTS, 89), Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2014. Hereafter, I will briefly summarise a few major ideas, taken from chapter 4 till chapter 7, pp. 227-334. In order to avoid inutile repetition, I will not give for every single idea the precise page where Gutas has formulated it.

philosophy, that the latter in all his works adhered to the common Aristotelian classification of the sciences. Ibn Sīnā did so fully in line with the Alexandrian tradition, in particular as transmitted through Paul the Persian, who highlighted the definition of philosophy as the medicine of souls.<sup>2</sup> However, Ibn Sīnā was the very first thinker who saw the real potential of the system, which the Alexandrians had adopted, namely the creation an ‘Encyclopaedia of unified science’ on the very basis of the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>3</sup> Implied in this view was as well the idea that truth must prevail over any kind of submission to (earlier) authorities, an idea which clearly became very dear to Ibn Sīnā.<sup>4</sup> For this latter the idea of progress in the acquisition of truth is central, so that no single past doctrine is sacrosanct. In chapter five, Gutas specifies that for Ibn Sīnā, the history of philosophy is nothing else than the record of the progressive acquisition of knowledge, and, in chapter six, he points out that Ibn Sīnā has to

<sup>2</sup> Gutas observes that Paul’s description of Aristotle’s oeuvre as a ‘course of treatment’ might have been the source of Ibn Sīnā’s title for *The Cure (ash-Shifā)*. Regarding Paul the Persian, see Dimitri Gutas, ‘Paul the Persian on the Classification of the Parts of Aristotle’s Philosophy: A Milestone between Alexandria and Baḡdad’, *Der Islam* 60 (1983), pp. 231–267, repr. in Id., *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition*, (Variorum Collected Studies Series: CS698), Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000. Gutas underlines that the medical metaphor (‘philosophy is the medicine of souls’) goes back to Aristotle himself. In an earlier work, i.e. Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Wisdom Literature in Arabic Translation. A Study of the Graeco-Arabic Gnomologia*, (American Oriental Series, 60), New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Society, 1975, p. 385, he substantiated this view by referring to the seminal article of Werner Jaeger, ‘Aristotle’s Use of Medicine as Model of Method in his Ethics’, *The Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 77 (1957), pp. 54–61. It is perhaps worthwhile to add that Jaeger indicates that Aristotle derived this idea from Plato (mainly *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*), but that he, contrary to Plato, did not apply it to philosophy as such, i.e. as an encompassing system of logos and bios (in line with Socrates), but limited it to practical philosophy. Hence, Paul the Persian seems to use the metaphor more according to a Platonic understanding than to Aristotle’s, even if he applies it to the latter’s system in its totality.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Barnes (tr.), *Aristotle. Posterior Analytics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. x.

<sup>4</sup> Here, I would like to draw attention to the additional fact that the qualification of blind trust in ‘authorities’ as a reprehensible attitude was already present in Greek thought, see e.g. Ammonius, *On Aristotle Categories*, trans. S. Marc Cohen and Gareth B. Matthews, (The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), Matthews, London: Duckworth, 1991, Prolegomena, p. 16: ‘In the tenth place, [...] one must inquire what sort <of person> a commentator on Aristotle’s writings needs to be. [...] For one must not, so to speak, sell oneself completely and accept what is said and in all earnestness support everything one comments upon as true, even if it is not. Rather one must examine each point closely and, if it should turn out that way, *prefer the truth to Aristotle*’ (my italics). Ammonius’s commentary is mentioned in Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* (see Sha’bān Khalīfa and Walīd Muḥammad al-Awza’, *Al-Fihrist li-Ibn al-Nadīm*, Cairo: al-‘Arabī, 1991, vol. I, p. 507), but, above all, a passage of his commentary, i.e. on 1a1 (more precisely, the use there of *legetai*), is present in Ibn Suwār’s marginal notes to Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn’s Arabic translation (according to MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2346), see Khalil Georr, *Les catégories d’Aristote dans leurs versions syro-arabes*. Beyrouth, 1948, p. 369, n. 4; ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, *Manṭiq Aristū*, Kuwait–Beirut: Wikālat al-Maṭbū‘āt–Dār al-Qalam, 1980, vol. I, pp. 83–84, n. 4.

confront problems inherent in Aristotle's texts ('loose ends'), problems created by the 'commentators' and vicissitudes related to the transmission from Greek into Arabic, especially the existence of pseudepigraphs, as e.g., the *Theology*.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, in chapter seven, Gutas insists that Ibn Sīnā's attitude toward Aristotle never changed in essence but only in expression: it evolved from traditional adulation to critical appreciation and respect. In sum, in his late period, Ibn Sīnā became more and more independent of the previous (Peripatetic) tradition and considered himself more and more as 'another Aristotle'.

As for Wisnovsky, he particularly emphasises that Ibn Sīnā is the culmination of one period of synthesis, i.e. the Ammonian synthesis, during which philosophers succeeded in incorporating the larger Neoplatonic project of harmonising Plato with Aristotle, into the smaller Peripatetic project of harmonising Aristotle with himself. But he stresses also that Ibn Sīnā stands at the beginning of another period of synthesis, during which philosophers sought

<sup>5</sup> Worthwhile to note is as well Gutas's additional observation that Ibn Sīnā, thanks to al-Fārābī, understood that metaphysics is not only a theology, but also a study of 'being qua being', hence detected in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* both a 'metaphysica specialis' and a 'metaphysica generalis'. I agree with Gutas, as well as with Amos Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's 'Metaphysics' in Ibn Sīnā's Kitāb al-Šifā'*. *A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought*, (IPTs, 63), Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2006, pp. 44–45 and 88–95, that al-Fārābī, and more particularly his treatise *Fī aghrād*, helped indeed Ibn Sīnā to better understand the purpose and subject matter of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. However, the story, as told in the *Autobiography* (see William Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina. A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, Albany–New York: State University of New York Press, 1974, pp. 32.1–34.4), is manifestly anything but an historical account. First of all, when Ibn Sīnā states that he read Aristotle's *Metaphysics* forty times up to the point of having memorised it, but nevertheless without having understood it, it is obvious that the number 'forty' here has a purely symbolic value, indicating 'many times'. Furthermore, when he admits that he saw no utility in this work of the Stagirite, he clearly applies one of the basic criteria of what in the later tradition of the 'Commentators' became the 'Prolegomena', i.e. the utility implied in the work under consideration. Finally, the fact that he stresses that he understood Aristotle's text immediately (*fī l-waqt*) after having read al-Fārābī's treatise seems an illustration of his preferred method of intuition, *ḥads*. Even if al-Fārābī's treatise is not very long, and offers serious clues to a better grasping of Aristotle's text, it is certainly not of such a nature that it can resolve at once all the difficulties implied in this latter. By emphasising the extreme difficulty of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Ibn Sīnā wants in all likelihood to point out its particularly eminent status as the highest of all sciences. So, it is quite normal that in order to understand it one needs a teacher. With regard to Aristotle, who could be better than the venerable master al-Fārābī, 'the Second Teacher'? Of course, this latter is not Ibn Sīnā's teacher in a physical, but rather in an intellectual sense. But, given Ibn Sīnā's own extraordinary gift of intuition, even then he does not need to frequent his master's work(s) for too long. However, a comparative study between the works of both giants of Arabic philosophy shows Ibn Sīnā's clear debt toward his predecessor, and in an even more substantial way than the *Autobiography* suggests.

to fuse together the Arabic version of the Ammonian synthesis with the ontology and theology of the Muslim *mutakallimīn* ('theologians').<sup>6</sup>

In what follows I want to detail a few of these affirmations based on an examination of what Ibn Sīnā's attitude toward Aristotle reveals to be in his *Kitāb al-Insāf*, namely in the two commentaries on *Lambda* 6-10 and the *pseudo-Theology*, although with a greater focus on the former than on the latter. Both commentaries are relatively late works and therefore part of the mature thought of the late Ibn Sīnā. Our analysis will largely confirm Gutas's observations that Ibn Sīnā's attitude toward Aristotle was influenced by vicissitudes of the Stagirite's texts, and that Ibn Sīnā became more and more critical of Aristotle even if he remained very respectful of the latter. However, it will be shown that this critical attitude does not only imply the indication of 'weaknesses' in Aristotle's statements, but as well of 'mistakes'. With regard to the 'commentators', our analysis will show that Ibn Sīnā blames above all the Arabic (Christian) commentators rather than the Greek ones, insofar as these latter sometimes have clarified imprecisions in Aristotle's texts. Thus remains certainly in line with Gutas's qualification of Ibn Sīnā as considering himself in his later works no longer as a member of, but as an impartial judge of the Aristotelian commentators. But his attitude toward Aristotle himself reveals to be almost the same. Certainly, Aristotle remains in his eyes the greatest of all previous philosophers, but he was not infallible. So, the difference in critical attitude toward the (good) commentators and to Aristotle is at best one of (a very small) degree. Unless I would have overlooked it, this is a nuance that I did not find in Gutas. As to Wisnovsky's thesis of Ibn Sīnā's adherence to the Peripatetic project of harmonising of Aristotle with himself, it will receive further confirmation. However, regarding his thesis of the Neoplatonic project of harmonising Plato with Aristotle, a need for nuancing will show up. Even if Ibn Sīnā can be considered as being indebted to the Ammonian synthesis, as becomes evident by his presenting a 'Neoplatonised Aristotle', he nevertheless seems not fully and unconditionally adhere to the idea of a great synthesis between the two giants of Greek thought.<sup>7</sup> In fact, he finds the (Neo-)Platonic idea of the pre-existence of the soul utterly un-Aristotelian; in fact, its affirmation in the '*Theology*' is the reason why he suspects that someone has corrupted the original text of Aristotle's work.

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<sup>6</sup> Rob Wisnovsky, *Ibn Sīnā's Metaphysics in Context*, London: Duckworth, 2003, *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> Gutas has already noted a serious switch in Ibn Sīnā's appreciation of Plato's thought: from a respectful attitude including the idea of the 'harmony between Plato and Aristotle' to a clear rejection of Plato, especially of the latter's theory of Ideas, see Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 323–324.

*Ibn Sīnā's Kitāb al-Insāf*

Before presenting this detailing, let me first briefly stress that there is no serious indication that Ibn Sīnā ever wrote much more than the fragments that have been preserved of the *Kitāb al-Insāf*. Certainly, this seems to be radically contradicted by what he says about the loss of this work in his letter to Kiyā, i.e. that he had written in a short time a work which, had it been transcribed clearly, would have comprised twenty volumes (and approximately twenty-eight thousand questions), but that its first draft was lost in the course of some route.<sup>8</sup> However, the only strong affirmation here is the loss of a 'first draft', nothing less, nothing more. All the rest is expressed in a conditional way. But, based on a passage in the *Mubāḥathāt*, where one finds quoted *Lambda* 1071b20–21, together with a laconic comment by Ibn Sīnā (which, however, is in line with many other actual passages of his commentary), one could believe that there indeed existed much more than this actually preserved commentary on *Lambda*.<sup>9</sup> However, when taking into account the larger context, it becomes likely that the author,

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Muḥsin Bīdārfar, Qom: Intishārāt-e Bīdārfar, 1413 HQ., 1371 HS, *al-Mulḥaq*, p. 375/ ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī in Id., *Aristū 'inda l-'Arab*. Cairo, 1947, repr. Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1978, p. 121; English translation in Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 57–58. The same story is related as well in similar, although not completely identical account, in what Gutas labels 'Memoirs of a disciple (Ibn Zayla?) writing from Rayy', see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Bīdārfar, pp. 80–81, §§ 127–129; English translation in Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 66–67. Contrary to Ibn Sīnā himself, the disciple gives very concrete ciphers, i.e. the work was composed in the period between the middle of the month of Dey and the end of the month of Ḥordād; it would come to six thousand folios in a written hand and ten thousand folios in a straight hand, and it would have contained over twenty-seven thousand lemmata. Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian Tradition*, p. 150, notes about these amazing figures ('amazing' insofar as they imply an actual writing of thirty-three folios each day): 'This may or may not be realistic, but in absence of any other information it is pointless to speculate on the matter'. But does Ibn Sīnā's own account not constitute an additional piece of information? It is extremely sober in comparison with the report of the disciple: it only mentions a first draft, a loss in the course of some route, and indicates that if it had been finished as planned it would have been voluminous, i.e. have covered twenty volumes. Nothing there indicates that it was already very voluminous at the time of the loss. Moreover, the loss of books (or parts of books) seems to be a trope, since e.g. Galen complains to have lost definitively several of his books in the fire of the Temple of Peace in Rome in 192 (although some of them are still accessible to us), as is perhaps as well the claim of having written an enormously voluminous work in a relatively small time, see e.g. Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, who, in his autobiography, pretends to have written as many as twenty thousand pages in a script as minute as that used in amulets (see Arthur J. Arberry, *The Spiritual Physick of Rhazes*, London: John Murray, 1950, quoted by Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian Tradition*, p. 61, n. 6). All in all, the disciple's wording looks therefore not very trustworthy from an objective historical point of view.

<sup>9</sup> For the fragment, see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Bīdārfar, p. 321, n. 901/ ed. Badawī, p. 173, nos 265–266.

who is responsible for the recension that reached us, consciously dropped it.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the limited loss of one or another quire is undoubtedly a more plausible hypothesis, especially in view of the very fact that the absence of a commentary on many passages of both *Lambda* 6-10 and the *pseudo-Theology* can easily be explained by their entailing many doxographical considerations. This is fully in conformity with what Ibn Sīnā, in his letter to Kiyā, states, namely that he limited himself in the *Kitāb al-Insāf* to ‘the difficult passages in the essential texts up to the end of the *Theologia Aristotelis*’.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, he, in this later phase of his research (c. 1028–1029), fully concentrates on expressing the truth in itself, and feels no longer any need to discuss older theories. This is clearly in line with Gutas’s description of Ibn Sīnā as becoming more and more independent of the previous tradition, as earlier mentioned. Moreover, this attitude is characteristic of Ibn Sīnā’s later ideal, called ‘oriental philosophy’, according to which—without including any serious rupture with his earlier thought—the focus was exclusively on the essential issues in philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Finally, it has to be observed that both commentaries deal with the highest parts of metaphysics, i.e. ‘theology’ proper, as articulated by Aristotle, although in a ‘limited’ way, in *Lambda*, and more precisely in *Lambda* 6–10 (of Kindian inspiration, but in line with a Neoplatonised Aristotelian view), and what Gutas has characterised as a ‘metaphysics of the rational soul’, a topic for which Ibn Sīnā could find an (in his view) ‘Aristotelian’ basis in the ‘Plotinian inspired’ *pseudo-Theology*.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Ibn Sīnā’s Arabic Aristotle*

There exist two main—although not encompassing all books—translations into Arabic of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, namely by Uṣṭāth and Iṣḥāq ibn Ḥunayn. When one looks at the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā’*, it is clear that Ibn Sīnā largely used Uṣṭāth’s translation, but now and then also Iṣḥāq’s.<sup>14</sup> As far as *Lambda* is concerned, one finds besides these two translations still additional ones, i.e. those of Shamlī, Abū Bishr Mattā (one or two?—together with the commentaries of Alexander of

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Sīnā (Avicenne), *Commentaire sur le livre ‘Lambda’ de la ‘Métaphysique’ d’Aristote (chapitres 6–10)*, ed., trad. and annot. Marc Geoffroy, Jules Janssens and Meryem Sebtī, (Études musulmanes, 43), Paris: Vrin, 2014, pp. 15–16. For the evidence of editorial work by a disciple, see *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15 and Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 151–152.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Bīdārfar, *al-Mulḥaq*, p. 375/ ed. Badawī, p. 121; English translation in Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian tradition*, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Sīnā (Avicenne), *Commentaire sur le livre ‘Lambda’*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> For a general survey of this work and its reception, see Maroun Aouad, ‘La Théologie d’Aristote et autres textes du *Plotinus Arabus*’, in Richard Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1989, pp. 541–590. As known, this work is largely based on part taken from Plotinus’s *Enneads* IV–VI.

<sup>14</sup> Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s ‘Metaphysics’*, chapter 8, especially pp. 310–316.

Aphrodisias and of Themistius) and Yahyā ibn 'Adī.<sup>15</sup> As stressed by Bertolacci, the high number of translations of *Lambda* is sign of a privileged attention to the theological side of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which characterises in different respects the metaphysical oeuvre of al-Kindī, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, there exist an anonymous paraphrastic translation of *Lambda* 6-10, which was clearly present in Ibn Sīnā's library.<sup>17</sup>

In the commentary on *Lambda*, as was already the case in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'*, Ustāth's translation is the preferred one, as evidenced by the vast majority of literal quotations. But it is also clear that Ibn Sīnā, on occasion, uses in this commentary the anonymous paraphrase, as well as—and even in a more significant way—Themistius's commentary. It is undoubtedly worthy to observe that Themistius's commentary and the anonymous translation have elements in common, and therefore it is no real surprise that Ibn Sīnā derives elements from both. He employs them most of the time to clarify vague, ambiguous or difficult to understand, statements in Ustāth's translation. For example, Ustāth's translation of 1072a17 (i.e., 'wa-ammā 'illa bi-an takūna abadan bi-anwā' shattā fa-kilāhimā wa-huwa bayyin an al-ḥarakāt laysa ka-dhālik', 'the cause of being eternally of different kinds is both of them; it is clear that the motions are not so') is extremely literal, and as such ambiguous.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, it supposes a full

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., chapter 1, where one finds detailed references to major sources for this information, i.e. Ibn Al-Nadīm's *Fihrist* and Averroes's *Great Commentary on the Metaphysics*. Let me add that there exists only one single testimony regarding a translation by Yahyā ibn 'Adī, namely in Averroes's commentary on Textus 13 of book *Lambda*, see Averroes, *Tafsīr mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, (Bibliotheca Arabica Scholasticorum, série arabe 7), Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1948, vol. III, p. 1463. The quoted fragment of Yahyā's translation covers the end of Textus 12 and the beginning of Textus 13, i.e. 1070a1-7. Compared to the translations of Abū Bisr Mattā and Ustāth it has particularities of its own, which, at first sight, constitute a more faithful translation of the Greek text. Aubert Martin, *Averroès. Grand Commentaire de la 'Métaphysique' d'Aristote (Tafsīr mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at)*. Livre Lam-Lambda traduit de l'arabe et annoté, (Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège, Fasc. 234), Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984, p. 101, n. 36, explicitly points to one case (*fa-min al-iqtīrār idhan an naqifa* for Greek ἀνάγκη δὴ στήναι) where Yahyā's translation is closer to the Greek vulgate than the two other translations. In addition, (at least) two other particularities of this translation can be referred to: (1) the presence of the conjunction *aw* in the formulation *bal mustadīr aw nuḥās* in full correspondence with the Greek text which has ἢ, and (2) the explicit addition of *fī al-ism* to *min al-muwāṭa'a* in an effort to translate in a very precise manner the Greek expression ἐκ συνωνύμων.

<sup>16</sup> Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's 'Metaphysics'*, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> In the edition of the commentary on *Lambda*, one finds in the apparatus of the sources references to this translation on several occasions, see Ibn Sīnā (Avicenne), *Commentaire sur le livre 'Lambda'*, e.g., p. 45, n. 3, p. 47, n. 1-1 and 6, etc. Let me add that in one manuscript this translation is ascribed to Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, but that there does not exist any further support for that ascription.

<sup>18</sup> Our translation is taken from Charles Genequand, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics. A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lām*, (IPTs, 1), Leiden: Brill,

point after the Greek word ἄμφω, as well as the readings δῆλον ὅτι instead of δηλονότι and οὐκουν instead of οὐκοῦν.<sup>19</sup> Ibn Sīnā, in his commentary, makes explicit what in Ustāth’s Arabic translation is vaguely referred to by *fa-kilāhimā*, ‘both’: it specifies that this ‘both’ has to be understood as referring to two causes, *sababayn*, i.e. the ‘stable’ cause, *al-sabab al-thābit*, and the ‘varying’ cause, *al-sabab al-mukhtalif*. Only the anonymous paraphrase uses, as Ibn Sīnā does, *sabab* for translating αἴτιος in this context, whereas this latter Greek word is rendered by ‘illa in Themistius (as well as in all other Arabic translations).<sup>20</sup> However, both Themistius and the anonymous paraphrase mention explicitly two causes, as Ibn Sīnā does in his commentary: a cause of ‘variety’, *ikhhtilāf*, and a cause of ‘stability’ (for Greek: αἰεὶ ὡσαύτως), but they express this latter in terms of *dawām* (*wa-bāqā’*), ‘duration (and continuation)’, whereas Ibn Sīnā instead uses *thābit*, ‘stable’, ‘permanent’.<sup>21</sup> This seems to indicate that the latter had access to yet another Greco-Arabic translation (or another Greek commentary in Arabic translation).

Such access is also strongly suggested at other occasions, as e.g., with regard to the (somewhat paraphrasing) wording of 1075a12 where the Arabic term *mufāriq*, ‘separate’, perfectly corresponds to the Greek word *κεχωρισμένον*. This is a much more precise translation than the one chosen by Ustāth, i.e. *mutamayyiz* (‘distinguished’), or the one attested in the anonymous translation (and furthermore confirmed by the Hebrew Themistius), namely *munfasil mufrad* (‘detached, isolated’).<sup>22</sup>

1984, p. 144. In the Greek text one reads: τοῦ δ’ αἰεὶ ἄλλως ἄμφω δηλονότι. οὐκοῦν οὕτως καὶ ἔχουσιν αἰεὶ κινήσεις (‘and evidently both together are the cause of eternal variety. This, accordingly, is the character which the motions actually exhibit’—Ross’s translation).

<sup>19</sup> See Pierre Thillet, ‘Remarques sur le livre Lambda de la Métaphysique,’ *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 70 (2003), pp. 361–400, pp. 388–390.

<sup>20</sup> Marc Geoffroy, ‘Remarques sur la traduction Ustāth du livre Lambda de la Métaphysique, chapitre 6,’ *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 70 (2003), pp. 417–436, p. 430, n. 32. The ultimate inspiration for Ibn Sīnā’s specifying the two causes in terms of stability and variability is, of course, already in Aristotle’s text, i.e. at 1072a16, where it is stated: καὶ γὰρ αἴτιον ἦν ἐκεῖνο τοῦ αἰεὶ ὡσαύτως: τοῦ δ’ ἄλλως ἕτερον. (‘for it was the cause of eternal uniformity, and something else is the cause of variety’—Ross’s translation).

<sup>21</sup> See *Faṣl fī ḥarf al-Lām min Kitāb mā ba’d at-ṭabī’a li-Aristūṭālīs al-faylasūf*, in ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Aristū inda l-‘Arab*, Cairo: Maktabat al-nahḍa al-miṣriyya, 1947, pp. 3–11, p. 5.3–4 and *Sharḥ Thāmistiyūs li-ḥarf al-Lām*, in *Ibid.*, pp. 12–21, p. 14.9–11.

<sup>22</sup> See Ibn Sīnā (Avicenne), *Commentaire sur le livre ‘Lambda’*, p. 108, n. 1. For similar cases in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā’*, see Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle’s ‘Metaphysics’*, pp. 311–312. According to Bertolacci, in these cases Ibn Sīnā probably used Iṣḥāq ibn Hunayn’s translation. Of course, this is possible, but, as far as I can see, in the actual state of affairs one can only speculate about the source of these translations, and therefore it is better to leave open all possibilities.



On occasion, Ustāth's translation clearly influenced in a most substantial way Ibn Sīnā's interpretation.<sup>23</sup> Such is manifestly the case with regard to how Ibn Sīnā understands what Aristotle says in 1072b13-15: 'ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς ἀρχῆς ἤρτηται ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ φύσις, διαγωγὴ δ' ἔστιν οἷα ἡ ἀρίστη μικρὸν χρόνον ἡμῖν' ('On such a principle, then, depends the heavens and the world of nature. The world of nature. And it is a life such as the best we enjoy, and enjoy but for a short time'—Ross's translation). In Ustāth's translation this is rendered as follows: 'fa-idhan bi-mabda'in (bi-badwin) mithla hādhā 'ulliqat al-samā' wa-l-ṭabī'a lanā ka-ḥāl ṣāliḥa zamānan qalīlan' ('it is on such a principle then that the heaven and nature depend; [it is?] for us like a happy state for a short time').<sup>24</sup> Since the word *samā'* can be used both in the masculine and in the feminine gender, it can function as the sole subject of the third feminine person singular of the passively used verb *'allaqa*, 'to depend on', i.e. *'ulliqat*. Since, moreover, to start a new sentence with *lanā*, 'for us', is from a grammatical point of view far from evident, it is understandable that a reader as e.g., Ibn Sīnā, relates this characterisation to the preceding notion of *al-ṭabī'a*, 'nature'. According to this 'specific' reading, Aristotle's affirmation can be translated into English as follows: 'It is on such a principle then that the heaven depends, and nature is for us like a happy state for a short time'. All in all, it comes as no surprise that Ibn Sīnā is convinced that an entirely new sentence starts with *wa-l-ṭabī'a* and does not hesitate to split Aristotle's affirmation into two separate sentences (*fa-idhan [...] al-samā'* and *wa-l-ṭabī'a [...] qalīlan*), each of which he provides with a separate commentary.<sup>25</sup> Proceeding this way, he does not really contradict Aristotle's thought. However, he suggests the existence of a more profound difference between heaven and nature than the Greek text does.

#### *Ibn Sīnā's Neoplatonized Aristotle*

However, can all divergences between Ibn Sīnā and Aristotle be reduced to weaknesses in the Arabic translation(s)? This is certainly not the case. Ibn Sīnā's commentary on the beginning of chapter seven, namely on Aristotle's affirmation (1072a21) of the existence of something that is eternally moving,

<sup>23</sup> I already paid attention to this case in my 'Ibn Sīnā et sa "paraphrase-commentaire" du Livre Lambda (Kitāb al-Inṣāf)', *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 70 (2003), pp. 401–416, pp. 411–412.

<sup>24</sup> See Averroes, *Tafsīr mā ba'd aṭ-ṭabī'at*, vol. III, p. 1611.14–15. I quote here Ustāth's translation according to its wording inside the commentary, not as it is mentioned (in a mutilated way) in the inferior marginal note to Textus 38 (pp. 1608.4–1609.1)—see already my 'Ibn Sīnā et sa "paraphrase-commentaire," p. 411, n. 50. As for the English translation it is a slightly modified version of Genequand's (see Genequand, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics*, p. 156).

<sup>25</sup> In the critical edition more than 15 lines separate their respective quotation (Ibn Sīnā [Avicenne], *Commentaire sur le livre 'Lambda'*, respectively, p. 55.125 and p. 56.142).

opens with a specification that a disciple has edited, and which runs as follows: ‘Ankara ‘alā Aristūṭālīs wa-l-mufassirīn fa-qāla, he (=Ibn Sīnā), while reproaching Aristotle and the commentators, said: ...’. This might give the impression that Ibn Sīnā simply rejects Aristotle’s view. But this is not at all the case. In fact, the disciple’s note clearly indicates that the commentators (*al-qawm*), not Aristotle himself (as previously thought in all contemporary research due to a mistake in Badawī’s edition)<sup>26</sup>, believed that to prove the existence of the First principle it suffices to show that this later is an (Unmoved) Mover. They—most unjustly—overlooked that God is not so much a principle of motion, but, above all, a principle of being. It is obvious that for Ibn Sīnā Aristotle is not guilty of a ‘major’ mistake. Ibn Sīnā, along clearly Neoplatonic inspired lines, stresses that if God is presented by Aristotle as the object of desire (1072a25), this cannot mean that something would have received from God only motion, and this clearly in line with Proclus’s insistence in his *In Timaeum* on the First principle as the cause that moves the cosmos to love Him.<sup>27</sup> Ibn Sīnā, inspired by another Neoplatonic work, i.e. the *pseudo-Theology*, insists also that everything ascends toward God. But, in all likelihood, Ibn Sīnā was above all influenced by Ammonius’s (lost) treatise on God as agent cause for Aristotle—Ammonius’s treatise is mentioned by Simplicius in his commentaries on the *Physics* and the *Heavens*, and also in the (Farabian?) work *Harmony of the two sages* as well as the *Fihrist* of Ibn Al-Nadīm. Based on the fragments quoted by Simplicius, one has the strong impression that Ammonius reacted directly against Alexander of Aphrodisias, especially the latter’s neglecting the idea of God as efficient cause, hence limiting God almost to an attractive final cause. Herein, one detects a clear parallel with the criticism that Ibn Sīnā here expresses against the ‘commentators’. It is perhaps worthwhile to add that the idea of God as efficient, and not only final, cause is not only typical of a Neoplatonic approach, but is also natural in an Islamic context.

If Ibn Sīnā recognises such undeniably ‘Neoplatonic’ approach as genuinely Aristotelian, this is undoubtedly due to the transmission of both the *pseudo-Theology* and the *Kitāb al-khayr al-mahḍ* (in the Latin world known as *Liber de Causis*) as books of ‘Aristotle’.<sup>28</sup> As noted by D’Ancona, the *Enneads* contained

<sup>26</sup> See [Ibn Sīnā], *Sharḥ kitāb ḥarf al-lām li-l-Shaykh al-Ra’īs Ibn Sīnā*, in Badawī, *Aristū inda l-‘Arab*, pp. 22–33, p. 23.23, where one finds *ithbāt* instead of *ithbāti-hi*, see Ibn Sīnā [Avicenne], *Commentaire sur le livre ‘Lambda’*, p. 87, n. 8. What follows in our recent exposition is largely based on this note as well as on some later notes (especially n. 15 and n. 27).

<sup>27</sup> Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. Hermann Diels, Leipzig: Teubner, 1903, vol. I, p. 266.

<sup>28</sup> Regarding the former of these works, see *supra*, n. 13. As far as the latter (which has its ultimate source in Proclus’s *Elementatio theologica*) is concerned, a basic outline, including all the relevant contemporary research literature, is now available in Dragos Calma, ‘The Exegetical Tradition of Medieval Neoplatonism. Considerations of a Recently Discovered Corpus of Texts,’ in Id. (ed.),

already 'Aristotelian' elements and these have been emphasised in the Arabic adaptation, i.e. the *pseudo-Theology*.<sup>29</sup> Regarding this latter, it has to be noted that Ibn Sīnā does not really doubt its being genuinely Aristotelian, even if he finds it 'suspect' in some sense.<sup>30</sup> However, what Ibn Sīnā finds 'suspect' is not the very attribution of the work to Aristotle, but the presence of a thesis that in his eyes is utterly un-Aristotelian, namely the affirmation of a pre-existence of the soul. Therefore, when he reads in the first *Maymar* of the *pseudo-Theology*: 'which (the intellect insofar as it is possessed by a desire) has seen in the Intellect', he qualifies this affirmation as resulting from a falsification by way of '*tahrīf*', 'corruption of the text'.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, Ibn Sīnā gives no indication who formed the precise source of this 'falsification', but, since he mainly refutes in his commentary Isma'īlite authors, especially al-Sijistānī, he might have believed that a (or some) Isma'īlite author(s) consciously intervened in the very wording of Aristotle.<sup>32</sup> More particularly, they would have done it in such a way that it conforms to their idea of the fall of the soul, and hence its pre-existence which is implied in this idea. But why exactly was for Ibn Sīnā this doctrine of a pre-existence of the soul so deeply un-Aristotelian? Perhaps he had in mind Aristotle's undeniable affirmation of 'abstraction'. This latter would indeed become completely superfluous if the idea of the pre-existence of the soul in the higher intelligible realm is accepted. Certainly, Ibn Sīnā, as is commonly known,

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*Neoplatonism in the Middle Ages. I. New Commentaries on 'Liber de Causis' (ca. 1250-1350)*, (Studia Artistarum, 42.1), Turnhout: Brepols, 2016, pp. 11–52, especially pp. 13–21.

<sup>29</sup> Cristina D'Ancona, 'Degrees of Abstraction in Avicenna. How to Combine Aristotle's *De Anima* and the *Enneads*', in Simo Knuuttila and Pekka Kärkkäinen (eds), *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, (Studies in the History of Mind, 6), Dordrecht: Springer, 2008, pp. 47–71, pp. 61–62.

<sup>30</sup> See Plotino, *La discesa dell'anima nei corpi* (ENN. IV 8 [6]). *Plotiniana Arabica (Pseudo-Teologia di Aristotele, Capitoli 1 e 7; Detti del Sapiente Greco)*, ed. Cristina D'Ancona, (Subsidia Mediaevalia Patavina, 4), Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2003, p. 110; see also D'Ancona, 'Degrees of Abstraction in Avicenna', p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> See [Ibn Sīnā], *Tafsīr kitāb Uthūlūjiyā min al-Inṣāf li-l-Shaykh al-Ra'īs Abū 'Alī Ibn Sīnā*, in Badawī, *Aristū inda l-'Arab*, pp. 35–73, p. 39.7; Plotino, *La discesa dell'anima nei corpi*, p. 125.1 (in her comment related to this passage, D'Ancona well explains the particular interpretation that the author of the *pseudo-Theology* offers of Plotinus's original affirmation, see *Ibid.*, pp. 264–265). As to the notion of *tahrīf*, it means essentially 'corruption'. Jews and Christians are commonly accused by Muslims of being guilty of it with regard to the texts of respected Torah and Gospels. However, some Muslim thinkers have understood it in the sense of a corruption of the very wording of these holy scriptures, while there have understood it as limited to a misinterpretation of those writings. In the present context, Ibn Sīnā clearly understand it as implying a direct intervention in the very wording of the text.

<sup>32</sup> There is a (strong) possibility that Ibn Sīnā has in mind here Isma'īlite authors, see Daniël De Smet, 'La doctrine des deux faces de l'âme et ses racines ismaéliennes', *Studia Islamica* 93 (2001), pp. 77–89 (with regard to al-Sijistānī as a prominent source [at least, as far as the doctrine of the double face of the soul is concerned], see especially pp. 81–82).

accepts the idea of an illumination from the Agent Intellect, but he nevertheless wants to valorise in some way abstraction. He effectively mentions the very notion of *tajrīd*, ‘abstraction’, and with regard to it, he explicitly refers to both Aristotle’s *De anima* and *De sensu et sensato*.<sup>33</sup> This acceptance of ‘abstraction’ creates undoubtedly some inner tension in his system given his ascription of the acquisition of intelligible realities to illumination by the Agent Intellect. However, it is obvious that Ibn Sīnā thought that the *pseudo-Theology* expressed genuine Aristotelian views, as e.g., on the supra-sensible causes.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the *pseudo-Theology*’s exposition permitted him to justify how the soul can arrive at a conjunction with the higher world. He needs the possibility of such justification in order to be able to affirm the immortality of each human soul—immortality which he equates (at least, for the perfect human soul) with a conjunction with the Agent Intellect. Such ideas were completely absent from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics, Lambda*. But in Ibn Sīnā’s view they are part of the theological project of the metaphysics, insofar as they constitute ‘a metaphysics of the rational soul’ as said at the beginning.<sup>35</sup> Hence for Ibn Sīnā, Aristotle was not only the ‘Aristotle’ of the actual ‘Aristotelian corpus’, but an undeniably Neoplatonised Aristotle, whose authorship of such a work as the Plotinian inspired *pseudo-Theology* (and, in all likelihood, also the Proclean inspired *Kitāb al-khayr al-mahd*) was not open to any fundamental doubt. Based on the evident presence of some un-Aristotelian elements, he did not reject Aristotle’s authorship, but rather thought, as indicated above, that the text had been manipulated by some dishonest people, as, for example, the Isma‘ilites. But, at the same time, it is obvious that he would have simply rejected Plotinus’s Platonic inspired of a pre-existence of the human soul, not at least because it is in radical opposition with (what he believes to be) Aristotle’s ‘genuine’ opinion.

If Ibn Sīnā might have suspected the Isma‘ilites of having ‘falsified’ the text of the *pseudo-Theology*, in his commentary on *Lambda* he clearly indicates that the so-called (Christian) Baghdādī Aristotelians were the ‘bad Aristotelians’ *par excellence*. That Ibn Sīnā had a very low opinion of them is already evident from a

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<sup>33</sup> See [Ibn Sīnā], *Tafsīr kitāb Uthūlūjīyā*, pp. 39.13–40.14. However, at first sight, he clearly found a basis for his conception of *tajrīd* in the *De sensu et sensato* (and also in the *pseudo-Theology*), but not really in the *De anima*. I owe this information to a provisory draft of a critical note that has been written in view of the critical edition (in collaboration between M. Chase, M. Geoffroy, J. Janssens and M. Sebti), together with French translation and annotation, to Ibn Sīnā’s commentary.

<sup>34</sup> With regard to the clear presence of Aristotelian elements in the *pseudo-Theology*’s exposition of supra-sensible causes, see D’Ancona, ‘Degrees of Abstraction in Avicenna’, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> The metaphysical significance of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is well illustrated by chapter seven of book nine of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā’*, where one finds a detailed account of the survival of each of the human souls in function of its intellectual (and/or moral) perfection/imperfection.

remark that is present in the *Memoirs of a Disciple writing from Rayy*. According to this remark, Ibn al-Ṭayyib, Ibn al-Khammār and Ibn al-Samḥ, all major members of the Aristotelian Baghdādī school, were weak thinkers who were 'satisfied with whatever they imagine to be the case [...], dismissing completely logic'.<sup>36</sup> In all likelihood, Ibn Sīnā judged their attitude not only weak as far as logic was concerned, but, as well, as they largely inscribed themselves in following the tradition of the 'Alexandrian commentaries', whereby they largely remained inside the framework of a (blind) imitation, not so much of Aristotle himself, but, above all, of the (early) Peripatetic commentators. In this sense, they missed, as did some of the Greek Peripatetic commentators as e.g., Alexander of Aphrodisias, the very idea of God as efficient cause and as cause of being. In other words, they seem to have missed the Neoplatonised Aristotle of Ammonius and the commentators after him. However, more detailed research is needed to settle this complex question in a precise way. But a first interesting indication with regard to the precise nature of Ibn Sīnā's criticism against these Baghdādī thinkers, can be found in his commentary on *Lambda*, namely in the quotation, and following critical evaluation, of a (small) dialogue between Abū Bishr Mattā and one of his disciples.<sup>37</sup> According to Ibn Sīnā, Abū Bishr Mattā defended the idea that the First cause's action is limited to maintaining the permanence of the celestial motion, while the latter is, in itself, necessary. In stating this, Abū Bishr forgot to make the basic distinction between a conditional necessity and a necessity in itself, and hence made himself guilty of a logical fallacy. More importantly, his affirmation implies that God would be responsible only for the sphere's (perpetually) moving, not for its very being. Ibn Sīnā, on the contrary, insists that it gives not only motion, but also being to each substance, hence that He is the principle of the essence of each substance. In accordance with his own metaphysical system, he concludes that everything, excepted for God himself, is necessary due to the relation it has with God as its principle.<sup>38</sup>

#### *Ibn Sīnā's Imperfect Aristotle*

Sometimes Ibn Sīnā points to weaknesses, or even mistakes in Aristotle's thought. As Bertolacci has shown, Ibn Sīnā does so in a disguised way, namely by

<sup>36</sup> See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Bīdārfar, pp. 81–82, §§ 132–133; English translation in Gutas, *Ibn Sīnā and the Aristotelian Tradition*, p. 63.

<sup>37</sup> Ibn Sīnā [Avicenne], *Commentaire sur le livre 'Lambda'*, p. 55, ll. 112–114 (quotation) and ll. 115–124 (commentary). The disciple in question was probably Abū 'Amr al-Ṭabarī; see Ahmad Hasnawi, 'Un élève d'Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus: Abū 'Amr al-Ṭabarī', *Bulletin d'études orientales* 48 (1996) [= Dominique Mallet (ed.), *Études de philosophie arabe. Actes du colloque Bordeaux, 17-19 juin 1994*, Damas: Institut français de Damas, pp. 35–45.

<sup>38</sup> One here easily recognises Ibn Sīnā's famous distinction between the 'necessary in itself' and the 'possible in itself, necessary through another'.

using explicit indeterminate quotations, in his *Shifā'*, but he, in his later works, as e.g. his commentary on *Lambda*, clearly more openly criticises the Stagirite.<sup>39</sup> On several occasions in this latter work, Ibn Sīnā points out a serious lack of precision in Aristotle's very wording. A good illustration is found in the commentary on *Lambda IX*, more precisely on 1074b16–34.<sup>40</sup> Ibn Sīnā notes that Aristotle, when affirming God's intellection of Himself (b34), does not clearly indicate how this self-intellection has to be understood: does God need to know everything in order to know Himself, or does it mean that His understanding of all things other than Him is implied in His Self-knowledge? For Ibn Sīnā the former of the two alternatives is clearly false, since it would make God dependent upon His creatures. However, Aristotle remains completely silent on this issue. Even if the right opinion in the present case is rather evident, Ibn Sīnā nevertheless blames Aristotle for not having given any indication. Also on other occasions, he deplores that the Stagirite did not express his ideas in a clearer and more open way. It is striking that Ibn Sīnā, in a digression after a direct comment on 1072b13–14 (heaven depends on a principle like this), makes (p. 57, 135–141) a 'laudatio' of Themistius, because this latter openly said that the first principle intellects Himself, and this according to a self-knowledge that encompasses the knowledge of all things, without implying any move from one intelligible to another.<sup>41</sup> Themistius, moreover, rightly insisted that God needs nothing to perfect His essence, including the intellection of other things. It is obvious that for Ibn Sīnā Themistius only made explicit what already was implicit in Aristotle's text, but given the vagueness of the latter, Themistius's clarification is highly valid.

But it also happens that Ibn Sīnā finds an anomaly, and, as such, a mistake in Aristotle's actual wording. Such is, for example, the case with the latter's statement (IX, 1074b29) that 'a continuity of intellection is something tiring'. According to Ibn Sīnā, this cannot be correct given that Aristotle says elsewhere that the material intellect reinforces itself when it intellects.<sup>42</sup> Ibn Sīnā insists that the tiring is due to the needed use of the instrument of the passive intellect and that Aristotle never identified the human soul with an intellect in act. Everything indicates that Ibn Sīnā tries here to correct as much as possible Aristotle by Aristotle himself—showing his adherence to the minor Peripatetic

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<sup>39</sup> Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's 'Metaphysics'*, pp. 319–320, and Id., 'Different Attitudes to Aristotle's Authority in the Arabic Medieval Commentaries on the *Metaphysics*', *Antiquorum Philosophia* 3 (2009), pp. 145–163, especially pp. 159–161.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Sīnā [Avicenne], *Commentaire sur le livre 'Lambda'*, p. 71.261–266. The same passage is discussed by Bertolacci, 'Different Attitudes to Aristotle's Authority', p. 161, but with a particular attention to the methodological weakness of Aristotle's starting-point.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.135–141.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.245–250. Ibn Sīnā probably refers to *De anima* III.4, 429a31–b5, where Aristotle deals with the impassibility of the faculty of intellection.

synthesis of Aristotle with himself. Ibn Sīnā notes that Themistius has offered a precision, namely that the divine intellect is not subject to any kind of becoming tired, because it intellects its own essence.<sup>43</sup> However, this explanation is in his view not yet adequate. For Ibn Sīnā, the real reason for the absence of tiredness in God's intellection is the absence of any contrariety in the substance of the one who intellects. Hence, Themistius rightly 'corrected' Aristotle's statement in denying any kind of tiredness in (divine) intellection, but he missed the proper reason for this. Even if he moved in the right direction, he still failed to express the truth. However, the criticism Ibn Sīnā formulates against Themistius, is in my view no less severe than the one expressed with regard to Aristotle a few lines before.

### Conclusion

The Aristotle of Ibn Sīnā is clearly not the one available in his Greek texts. It is obvious that Ibn Sīnā was directed (and, sometimes, misled) by the Arabic translations which he used for his examination of the Stagirite's thought. Moreover, his Aristotle was a Neoplatonised Aristotle. Clearly, this latter made it much easier for Ibn Sīnā to deal in a philosophical way with such religiously significant issues as e.g., the survival of the soul and 'providence', as is evidenced in his commentary on the *pseudo-Theology*. But Ibn Sīnā's Aristotle was above all a great thinker, and perhaps the greatest of all philosophers. Nevertheless, Ibn Sīnā avoids blind idolatry of 'the Philosopher' or to 'the First teacher'. In fact, he does not hesitate to indicate the existence of a few weaknesses in the latter's actual wording. But he is much more critical of some of the commentators, especially those who did not critically deal with their sources, including Aristotle's texts. Acting this way, they simply stop doing what is essential in philosophising, i.e. an uninterrupted critical reflexion on and interrogation of reality. In this sense, he simply applies what Ammonius required of every serious commentator:

He must know very well that which he is to comment on, and must also be an intelligent man, in order to present the Philosopher's thought and to examine closely the truth in what he says. For one must not, so to speak, sell oneself completely and accept all what is said and in all earnestness support everything one comments upon as true, even if it is not. Rather, one must examine each point closely and, if it should turn out that way, prefer the truth to Aristotle.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For this reference to Themistius, and the criticism related to it, see *Ibid.*, p. 69.251–254.

<sup>44</sup> Ammonius, *On Aristotle: Categories*, p. 16, see *supra*, n. 4. Let me add that also Simplicius's commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* might have been a direct source of inspiration for Ibn Sīnā, since it is also attested in the *Fihrist* (and confirmed by Ibn Suwār, see Richard Walzer, 'New Light on the Arabic Translations of Aristotle', *Oriens* 6 (1953), pp. 91–142, pp. 103–104), and contains many ideas in common with Ammonius's wording (stressing *inter alia* that the

Had indeed Aristotle himself, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (1096a15), not already emphasised that truth has always to be preferred, even if one has to sacrifice one's closest personal ties? The adagium 'Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas' became famous in Latin scholasticism.<sup>45</sup> Ibn Sīnā would have undoubtedly agreed with it, but instead of Plato, he probably would have said 'Aristotle'. For him this latter is the real father of philosophy, but nevertheless he is not infallible, hence: 'Aristotle is a friend, but truth is more friend to me than he is'.

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commentator should not obstinately persist in trying to demonstrate that Aristotle is always and everywhere infallible—see Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Categories* I-IV, translated by Michael Chase, London: Duckworth, 2003, p. 23).

<sup>45</sup> Note, however, that the saying has its origins in late Greek thought, as shown by Elias's introduction to his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, where it is said: 'the author is a dear friend, but so also is truth, and when both stand before me truth is the better friend', translation Nigel Guy Wilson (*Scholars of Byzantium*, London: Duckworth, 1983, p. 47) as quoted in Christian Wildberg, 'Elias', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2016 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/elias/>>.