Contextualizing the *Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khair* / *Liber de causis*

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While the *Liber de causis*, Gerard of Cremona's twelfth century Latin translation of the *Kalām fī maḥḍ al-khair* (hereafter, the *Arabic De causis*¹) was commonly albeit incorrectly ascribed to Aristotle² and in some sense accepted as authored by Aristotle by many medieval thinkers, modern accounts have sometimes focused on its Greek source in the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus as if it is little more than Proclus in Arabic.³ No doubt some have been influenced by the remarks of Thomas Aquinas who first wrote that the source was not Aristotle but Proclus in his 1272 *Commentary on the Liber de causis*. While Aquinas

- 1 With this name I refer to the Arabic work which was translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona. Presently there are two extant complete Arabic manuscripts and various other Arabic works which are witnesses to portions of the *Arabic De causis*. Whether an extant Hebrew translation may be from another Arabic manuscript is yet to be fully determined. The Latin translation itself is a witness to another Arabic manuscript. The Arabic text was critically edited in my 1981 doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto. See Taylor 1981. Earlier printed editions were published in *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift* and *Al-Aflāṭūniya*. Another work that in some ways intersects with the *Arabic De causis* was discovered by S. Oudaimah and edited, translated and published by P. Thillet and S. Oudaimah. See Thillet, Oudaimah 2001–2002. Other Arabic texts from the *Elements of Theology* are edited by Gerhard Endress in Endress 1973. For an overview the *De causis* generally, see the collected essays in D'Ancona 1995 and D'Ancona and Taylor 2003. For more recent work, see D'Ancona 2010 and 2014. See Wakelnig 2006 and 2011. Wakelnig's developing research on the Arabic *Elements of Theology* seems to support the notion that all or very much of the Greek was translated into Arabic. See Wakelnig 2012. C. D'Ancona and I are now preparing a new edition of the *Arabic De causis*.
- 2 The work is "Aristotelian" insofar as it is a product of the *Circle of al-Kindi*, as is the famous *Theology of Aristotle* (see *Al-Aflāṭūniya*) of the *Plotiniana Arabica* which was prepared by al-Kindi from the *Plotiniana Arabica* texts available to him. On the meaning of "Aristotelian" here, see Endress 1997 and also D'Ancona 2017. Regarding D'Ancona's project to edit the *Theology of Aristotle*, see <http://www.greekintoarabic.eu>.
- 3 Even now Oxfordreference.com simply describes it as "A treatise, consisting largely of extracts from Proclus' 'Elements of Theology', put together in Arabic by an unknown Muslim philosopher c. 850." See <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100103903>.

may have accepted early in his career that this work had some connection with the teachings of Aristotle or was even composed in some sense by Aristotle as did many predecessors and contemporaries, he declared in his *Commentary* that the *De causis* seemed to be a work which “one of the Arab philosophers excerpted ... from this book by Proclus, especially since everything in it is contained much more fully and more diffusely in that of Proclus”.⁴ Yet, as will be made clear in what follows, that generalization is not correct. Still, whether accepting it as Aristotelian—as was commonly done—or later less commonly as Proclean, theologians and philosophers in the context of Medieval Europe found the *Liber de causis* to be a rich and inspiring source of metaphysical and cosmological principles and reasoning on God and creatures as witnessed by well over 250 extant manuscripts and the extensive number of commentaries of various forms that have survived to today.⁵

In its own context, however, the *Arabic De causis* is by no means merely a collection of excerpts from Proclus out of what was available of the *Elements of Theology* among the *Procleana Arabica*. Rather, although one of the Arabic manuscripts prefaces the work with the explanation that it is a summary of the account of Plato excerpted by Proclus and is said to be by Plato,⁶ it is nevertheless unquestionably a work of the “Aristotelian” *Circle of al-Kindī*⁷ in which appeared the famous *Theology of Aristotle* edited by al-Kindī himself

4 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Librum de causis*, p. 3; transl. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, p. 4. L. Minio Paluella 1972, p. 530–531, remarks that it is likely William of Moerbeke who first discovered that this work draws on the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus. Aquinas is the first to note that in writing in his 1272 *Commentary*. Aquinas early in his career seems to have followed the custom of many to attribute this work to “the philosopher,” scil. Aristotle. This is the case for his citations of the work in his *Commentary on the Sentences*. For example, see *Super Sent.* 1, d.8, q.1, a.2 sed contra.

5 Taylor 1983; and Calma 2016, p. 20 f.

6 See *The Liber de causis (Kalām fī maḥd al-khair)*, p. 136 and 282. The Leiden manuscript Bibliothek der Rijksuniversiteit, Oriental 209 (formerly Golius 209) ascribes the work to Aristotle: *Kitāb al-īdāḥ li-Arīṣṭūṭālīs fī al-khair al-maḥd*: “The book of Aristotle’s Exposition on the Pure Good.” The Latin tradition generally ascribes it to Aristotle, as does one of the earliest and most important Latin manuscripts, Aosta, Seminario maggiore 71 (olim A1° D 20) which has *Liber Aristotelis de expositione bonitatis purae*: “The Book of Aristotle on the Exposition of the Pure Good.” Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi, Dil ve Tarih-Çografya Fakültesi Kütüphanesi, MS İsmail Saib 1 1696, has “Discourse on the Pure Good. It is said that Proclus excerpted it from the Discourse of Plato and it is also said that it is by Plato.” The issue of the differing ascriptions found in the Arabic manuscripts will be addressed in the new edition of the *Arabic De causis* now in preparation.

7 This valuable term is first set out in Endress 1997. On the meaning of “Aristotelian” here, see Endress 1997 and also D’Ancona 2017.

and other texts from the available *Plotiniana Arabica*.⁸ This may be why two manuscripts attribute the *Arabic De causis* to Aristotle. In the preface to the *Theology of Aristotle* the author—presumably al-Kindi himself—indicates the *Theology of Aristotle* is based on a translation by the Christian Ibn Nā'ima al-Ḥimṣī, something that likely applies to all the texts of the *Plotiniana Arabica* because of the similarity of vocabulary and doctrine.⁹ The *Plotiniana Arabica* itself in its three collections, the *Theology of Aristotle*, the ps.-Farabian *Letter on Divine Science*, and the *Sayings of the Greek Wiseman*, considered as a whole is a work of translations, paraphrases and distinctively innovative doctrines regularly transforming Plotinian teachings to its own ends.¹⁰ The novel teachings of the *Plotiniana Arabica* also are foundational for the unknown author of the *Arabic De causis*. This is simply because, though the *Arabic De causis* employs translations of texts of the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus, those are often sculpted to fit the vocabulary and doctrine found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* as well as to fit the reasoning the author of the *Arabic De causis* is constructing in his particular argumentative contexts.¹¹ Further, in the case of one of the most important metaphysical chapters of the *Arabic De causis*, there is no direct use of any text of the *Elements of Theology* at all; rather, nearly the entire chapter is formed by teachings found in the three works making up the *Plotiniana Arabica*.¹²

In this short contribution I contextualize the *Arabic De causis* as a work conceived and written in the doctrinal framework of the teachings found in the *Plotiniana Arabica*, texts and teachings which set out a version of the thought of Plotinus much revised in ways to fit the religious and philosophical contexts of its time.¹³ I do so by examining the single chapter of the *Arabic De causis* which does not draw explicitly on a text from the *Elements of Theology* but

8 Adamson 2017; Adamson 2002; D'Ancona 1991; 2004; 2012; 2017.

9 D'Ancona 2017, p. 10; Adamson 2002, p. 7–9; Adamson 2017, section 2, Historical questions. Some fascinating conjectures about Ibn Nā'ima and the Christian contexts of his time are discussed in Treiger 2015. My thanks to M. Chase for calling my attention to this and for other valuable corrections and suggestions.

10 Lewis 1959 contains translations of nearly all the *Plotiniana Arabica* available at that time. Though D'Ancona's ERC Project is focused on the *Theology of Aristotle*, her research includes all of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. See <http://www.greekintoarabic.eu/index.php?id=2> and <http://www.greekintoarabic.eu/index.php?id=26&reset=1>.

11 This has been well established by C. D'Ancona in a long series of articles on the *Arabic De causis*. See her collection in D'Ancona 1995a, particularly D'Ancona 1995b. Also see D'Ancona 1993.

12 See D'Ancona 1995a, p. 191 and more generally D'Ancona 2011.

13 D'Ancona argues for an influence of the *Procleana Arabica* on teachings found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* in D'Ancona 1999, 63f.

rather derives from the *Plotiniana Arabica*¹⁴ and just two additional sample passages of the *Arabic De causis* which evidence clearly the author's adherence to the teachings of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. The latter two selections display the author's efforts to modify the texts and ideas of the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus to form his work into the distinctive treatise that we have today. I then consider the *Arabic De causis* both as a Neoplatonic contribution to the development of metaphysical thought in the early period of philosophy in the lands of Islam and also as a work furthering the agenda of al-Kindi to show the compatibility and complementarity of philosophy to the ends of Islamic—if not more broadly Abrahamic—religion in the context of ninth century Baghdad. I conclude with a brief summary of what has been reasoned in the two major parts of this article.

1 The *Arabic De causis* and the *Plotiniana Arabica*

While the author of the *Arabic De causis* accesses texts from an Arabic version of the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus, he pulls those texts into his own philosophical context already dominated by a metaphysics based on the *Plotiniana Arabica* and the *Circle of al-Kindi*. Regarding the First Cause, the *Sayings of the Greek Wiseman* sets forth a conception of It as the True One (*al-wāḥid al-ḥaqq*) and as the Pure True Being (*al-huwiyya al-ḥaqqā al-maḥḍa*) which is without adornment¹⁵ or form. As such It is only being (*lā ḥilya la-hā wa-lā šūra la-hā ... anniyya faqaṭ*).¹⁶ As Creator It is unlike any of the created things and unique (*al-mubdi' al-'awwal lā yushbih shai' min al-'ashyā' ... al-mubdi' al-'awwal wāḥid waḥda-hu*). As First Agent It is the unmoving emanative cause of the first effect, intellect, through which things intelligible and sensible emanate from It (*al-fā'il al-'awwal ... sākin ghaira mutaḥarrik ... al-ma'lūl al-'awwal ... inbajasat min-hu*

14 See the list of source propositions of Proclus's *Elements of Theology* for the *Arabic De causis* in D'Ancona 1995b, p. 191.

15 *Ḥilya* can mean jewelry or something adorning a person. D'Ancona translates it as "détermination formelle" and indicates the sense of predicate. Hence, the First Cause transcends predication and names except in the limited sense that It may be denominated through Its effects, a sense that does not capture the very nature of the First Cause in Itself. See D'Ancona 1995a, p. 18, 20, 106, 108, 110, 171, 182.

16 Wakelnig 2014, p. 93; 88; 94–96 respectively. For this article I draw key Arabic texts largely although not solely from Wakelnig's edition with translation of Oxford, Bold. Or. Marsh 539 which contains many of the extant *Sayings of the Greek Wiseman*, though I freely modify the translation at times to show the similarity of the Arabic in that work and the *Arabic De causis*.

sā'ir al-'ashyā' al-'aqliyya wa-al-ḥissiyya bi-tawassuṭ al-'aql).¹⁷ And the *Theology of Aristotle* has a consideration of *Enneads* IV 7.8.3 with a summarizing account as follows:

We say that God ... is cause of intellect, and intellect is cause of soul, and soul is cause of nature, and nature is cause of all generated individual beings. However, while some things are cause of others, God ... is cause of all of them altogether, though He is cause of some of them mediately and cause of some of them without mediation.¹⁸

Further, the True One, while It remains beyond the reach of created knowledge, is Itself the pure transcendent knowledge which encompasses every sort of knowledge and is the cause of all the kinds of knowledge (*huwa al-'ilm al-maḥḍ al-'aqṣā al-muḥīt bi-kull 'ilm wa 'illa al-'ulūm*). Since It is without form, the First Creator is unlimited or infinite in every way (*fa-huwa min kull al-jihāt ghaira mutanāh*) and not in any way a plurality (*kathīran min jiha*).¹⁹ It is what conserves (*ḥāfiẓu-hā*) all created things, for Its essence is the Pure True Good (*dhāta-hu ḥiyya al-khair al-maḥḍ al-ḥaqq*).²⁰

The *Plotiniana Arabica*'s characterizations of the True One and Creator in Itself and in Its causation of creatures set out in the previous paragraph are also found in the sole chapter of the *Arabic De causis* which does not draw directly on any proposition of the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus. In chapter 8 the author writes:

The stability and the subsistence of every intellect are only through the Pure Good which is the First Cause. The power of intellect is more strongly unitary than [that of] second things which are after it because they do not attain to its knowledge. This came to be so only because it is a cause for what is below it.

The proof of that is what we state: intellect governs (*mudabbirun*) all the things which are below it through the divine power in it, and by that [divine power] it sustains things because by [divine power] it is the cause

¹⁷ Wakelnig 2014, p. 94–96; and 94.

¹⁸ *Aflūṭīn*, p. 50. My translation. I follow Lewis 1959, p. 205, in retaining the reading of manuscript Istanbul, Ayasofya 2457. Though I use the text of Badawi, I generally follow the readings of Lewis. Note that the author follows the Plotinian scheme of the One, followed by intellect, soul and nature. This is also found in the *Arabic De causis*, chapter 8.

¹⁹ Wakelnig 2014, p. 98 and 100 respectively.

²⁰ Wakelnig 2014, p. 102 and 98 respectively.

of things. It sustains and encompasses all the things below it. For what is primary for things and a cause of them sustains those things and governs (*mudabbirun*) them, and none of them eludes it due to its exalted power. Intellect, then, is ruler (*ra'is*) of all the things below it, sustaining and governing them. Just as nature governs over the things below it through the power of soul, likewise soul governs the things below it by the power of intellect as intellect similarly governs nature through divine power. Intellect came to sustain things which are after it, to govern them and to exalt its power over them only because it is an intellectual power which is a power neither characteristic of soul nor characteristic of nature because they are not a substantial power belonging to it. Rather, it is the power of substantial powers because it is the cause of them.

Intellect encompasses generation, nature and what is at the horizon of nature, namely soul, for it is above nature. For nature encompasses generation, and soul encompasses nature, and intellect encompasses soul. Intellect, then, encompasses all things. Intellect has come to be so only due to the First Cause which is exalted over all things because it is the cause of intellect, soul, nature and all other things.

The First Cause is neither intellect nor soul nor nature, but rather It is above intellect, soul and nature because It is creator of all things. However, It is creator of intellect without mediation and creator of soul, nature and all other things through the mediation of intellect. And divine knowledge is not like the knowledge of intellect nor like the knowledge of soul, but rather [divine knowledge] is above the knowledge of the intellect and the knowledge of soul because [divine knowledge] is creative of [the kinds of] knowledge. Divine power is above every power of intellect, soul and nature because it is cause of every power. Intellect possesses formal adornment (*hilyah*) because it is being (*anniyya*) and form (*ṣurah*), and likewise soul possesses formal adornment and nature possesses formal adornment, but the First Cause has no formal adornment because It is only being (*anniyya faqat*). So if someone says: It must have formal adornment, we say: Its formal adornment is infinite and Its [distinctive] individual nature (*shakhs*) is the Pure Good pouring forth on intellect all goodnesses and on all other things through the mediation of intellect.²¹

21 Square brackets indicate my addition, mostly of the referents of pronouns. This translation is based on a draft of a newly revised edition of the *Arabic De causis* in preparation by Cristina D'Ancona and myself. The text and translation in my unpublished dissertation are close to this. See *The Liber de causis* (*Kalām fī maḥd al-khair*), p. 298–300. Cf. *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift*, p. 76–79; *Al-Aflāṭūniyya*, p. 3–4.

For the metaphysical teachings in chapter 8 of the *Arabic de causis* the author clearly draws on the *Plotiniana Arabica* from all three of the collections extant today: the *Sayings of the Greek Wiseman*, the *Theology of Aristotle* and the pseudo-Farabian *Epistle on the Divine Science*. The doctrines of the One (i) as pure being and only being without adornment (*ḥilya*) or form (*ṣura*), (ii) as the Creator and cause of intellect and through the mediation of intellect cause of soul and of nature, (iii) as the Pure Good, (iv) as Itself infinite, and more are the same in both the *Plotiniana Arabica* and the *Arabic de causis* with the same vocabulary used in both works.²²

We can note in addition that (v) the doctrine of the Creator and Pure Good as Itself transcendent knowledge creative of the kinds of knowledge found in intellect and soul introduces in chapter 8 of the *Arabic De Causis* a distinctive conception commonly disavowed of the One by Plotinus when it employs the notion of Divine Knowledge.²³ For Plotinus the notion that the First Principle has or is knowledge is clearly rejected for the sake of Its simplicity. A teaching such as that of Aristotle wherein the highest principles and separate movers are considered as self-thinking thought is explicitly rejected by Plotinus who relegates that to the second principle, *Nous* or Intellect.²⁴ Yet this notion can be found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* in its third extant portion, the pseudo-Farabian *Epistle on the Divine Science*, *Risāla fī'l-'ilm al-ilāhī*. This has recently been analyzed and expounded in detail by Cristina D'Ancona who shows that the description of the Creator or First Cause as having knowledge may well be grounded in a misreading (unintentional or otherwise) of the text of Plotinus on the part of the translator of the Greek into Arabic.²⁵ In brief, for Plotinus, while the One is Itself unknowable and not Itself characterized as knowing, from the viewpoint of *Nous* or Intellect which proceeds from the One, the One is what *Nous* is in some sense able to know with the result that *Nous* is filled with unlimited forms in its attempt to apprehend the One. To this extent *from the perspective of Nous*, the One is a *noeton*, a thing known. What we find in the *Epistle on the Divine Science* of the *Plotiniana Arabica* is that the translator and

22 For a much more detailed account of the doctrines and sources of this Chapter, see D'Ancona 1995b.

23 Of this D'Ancona writes, "the Arabic sentence gives a distinct non-Plotinian ring." D'Ancona 2018, p. 148. Also see p. 149. Still, for a discussion of passages in which Plotinus attributes to the One knowledge or intellection of some sort, see Bussanich 1987.

24 See, e.g., Plotinus, *Enneads* v 1, 9. For more references and discussion, see Rist 1973.

25 For the translator, however, this may not have been a mistake but rather a confirmation of the truth of God as all knowing, a teaching common to the Abrahamic religious traditions. This issue will have to be taken up elsewhere. Note, however, that M. Chase argues in his article in the present volume that this notion may come from Porphyry.

adaptor has taken that description of the One as *noeton* from the perspective of *Nous* and applied it as a predicate characterizing the One or Creator Itself. Hence, in the *Epistle on the Divine Science* it can be said that the Creator and First Cause is in Its own right *noeton*, knows Itself, and, thus, has Divine Knowledge. This is the doctrine we find set out in chapter 8 of the *Arabic De causis*, a doctrine that can be seen in context to draw upon Aristotle as well as Plotinus.²⁶ Still, to say that the First Cause has knowledge or is not without knowledge does not imply that Its knowledge is derived from the world, that is, from anything outside Itself.

It is in accord with these teachings of the *Plotiniana Arabica* that the author transforms texts of Proclus considered in the two samples to follow.

The first sample is a partial extract from the beginning of Chapter 5 of the *Arabic De causis*²⁷ where we find the following:

The First Cause transcends attribute (*al-ṣifa*). Languages are incapable of [expressing] Its attribute by describing (*wasf*) Its being (*anniyati-hā*) because It is above every cause. It is described only through the second causes which are illuminated by the light of the First Cause. For the First Cause illuminates first Its effect and is not illuminated by another light because It is the Pure Light above which there is no ⟨other⟩ light. For this reason, therefore, the First alone came to surpass ⟨any⟩ attribute (...).²⁸

The *Procleana Arabica* sources for this chapter are Propositions 11 and 123 of the *Elements of Theology*, yet neither makes mention of light or illumination. At the start of proposition 123 we find the following:

Prop. 123. All that is divine is itself ineffable and unknowable by any secondary being because of its supra-existential unity, but it may be apprehended and known from the existents which participate it wherefore only the First Principle is completely unknowable, as being unparticipated.²⁹

26 D'Ancona 2018, p. 145 f.

27 Cf. D'Ancona 2000.

28 This translation is based on a draft of a new edition of the *Arabic De causis* in preparation. The text and translation in my unpublished 1981 dissertation are close to this. See *The Liber de causis* (*Kalām fī maḥd al-khair*), p. 160–161. Cf. *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift*, p. 69–70; *Al-Aflātūnīya*, p. 11–12.

29 Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, p. 108–109.

While this is a source of *Arabic De causis* Chapter 5, the source of the use of the metaphors of light and illumination is rather the *Sayings of the Greek Wiseman* in the *Plotiniana Arabica*:

It is said that the Pure One resembles light, the second one which is related to something else resembles the sun, and the third thing resembles the moon which attains its light from the sun. Thus, in the soul, there is an acquired intellect which illuminates it with its light and makes it intellectual. In the intellect, there is essential light, and it is not only light, but also a substance receiving light. As to what illuminates the intellect and pours light over it, It is only light and nothing other than light, but simple, absolute, pure light which pours Its power over the intellect and makes it an illuminating, enlightening intellect. Yet, the light in the intellect is something in something else, whereas the light which illuminates the intellect is not in anything else, but is light alone, subsisting and lasting in Its essence. It illuminates all things, but there are things which receive Its light more abundantly and others which receive it less.³⁰

Here the author of the *Plotiniana Arabica* provides a close rendering of *Enneads* v 6,4.14–22, with some elaboration. Plotinus himself writes,

The First, then, should be compared to light, the next, to the sun, and the third, to the celestial body of the moon, which gets its light from the sun. For Soul has intellect as an external addition which colours it when it is intellectual, but Intellect has it in itself as its own, and is not only light but that which is enlightened in its own being; and that which gives it light is nothing else but is simple light giving Intellect the power to be what it is. Why then would it have need of anything? For it is not the same as that which is in something else: for, that which is in something else is different from that which is in and by itself.³¹

30 For the Arabic text with English translation, see Wakelnig 2014, p. 96–99. Here I modify her translation slightly. Cf. the translation by Lewis 1959, p. 367.

31 Plotinus, *Enneads* v 6,4.14–22, (transl. Armstrong, p. 210–211): Καὶ οὖν ἀπεικαστέον τὸ μὲν φωτὶ, τὸ δὲ ἐφεξῆς ἡλίῳ, τὸ δὲ τρίτον τῷ σελήνης ἄστρῳ κομιζομένῳ τὸ φῶς παρ' ἡλίου. Ψυχὴ μὲν γὰρ ἐπακτὸν νοῦν ἔχει ἐπιχρωννύνα αὐτὴν νοερὰν οὖσαν, νοῦς δ' ἐν αὐτῷ οἰκεῖον ἔχει οὐ φῶς ὦν μόνον, ἀλλ' ὃ ἐστὶ πεφωτισμένον ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ οὐσίᾳ, τὸ δὲ παρέχον τούτῳ τὸ φῶς οὐκ ἄλλο ὢν φῶς ἐστὶν ἀπλοῦν παρέχον τὴν δύναμιν ἐκείνῳ τοῦ εἶναι ὃ ἐστὶ. τί ἂν οὖν αὐτὸ δέοιτο τίνος; οὐ γὰρ αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ ἐν ἄλλῳ· ἄλλο γὰρ τὸ ἐν ἄλλῳ ἐστὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ καθ' αὐτὸ ὂντος.

This account in the *Plotiniana Arabica* clearly is the inspiration for the use of the metaphors of light and illumination imported by the author into the *Arabic De causis*.

The second sample comes from *Arabic De causis* Chapter 21. Aquinas had some difficulty locating the precise source in Proclus for this chapter and suggested that it is generally based on Propositions 115 and 18 of the *Elements of Theology*.³² D'Ancona, however, has suggested that this chapter is in some way related to Proposition 131.³³

The First Cause is above every name by which It is named. For neither deficiency nor mere perfection is appropriate to It because the deficient is imperfect and unable to effect a perfect act since it is deficient. The perfect, in our view, although sufficient in itself, is unable to create another thing and to pour forth anything from itself at all. If this is so, we resume and say that the First Cause is neither deficient nor merely perfect, but rather It is above perfection because It is creator of things and that which pours forth goods on them in a perfect emanation because It is a good which has neither limit nor dimensions. The First Good, therefore, fills all worlds with goods, except that each world receives of that good only in accordance with Its capacity.

Thus, it has become clear and evident that the First Cause is above every name by which It is named and transcends it and is more exalted than it.³⁴

This chapter of the *Arabic De causis* may well have Proposition 131 in Proclus as a source, but it seems to have been expressed here in accord with the doctrines of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. In book 10 of the *Theology of Aristotle* we find the following which draws on Plotinus, *Enneads* v 2,1. The italicized text approximates the Greek of Plotinus.

I say that the Pure One is above the perfect and the complete. The sensible world is deficient because it is created from the perfect thing which is the intellect. Intellect comes to be perfect and complete because it is

32 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Librum de causis*, p. 115; transl. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, p. 129.

33 D'Ancona 1995, p. 191. Plotinus, *Enneads* v 2,1, may well be a source for Proposition 131.

34 This translation is based on a draft of a new edition of the *Arabic De causis* in preparation. It differs only slightly from the Arabic text in *The Liber de causis* (*Kalām fī maḥd al-khair*), p. 232–234. Cf. *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift*, p. 99–100; *Al-Aflāṭūniya*, p. 22–23.

created by the True Pure One which is above perfection. It is not possible for the thing which is above perfection to create the deficient thing in an unmediated way and it is not possible for the perfect thing to create a thing perfect like itself because it is deficient in the creation, I mean by this that what is created is not in the rank of the Creator but rather is below It.

The proof that *the Pure One is perfect* and above perfection is that *It has no need of anything nor does It seek to attain something. Owing to the power of Its perfection and Its superabundance another thing is produced from It.* For the thing which is above perfection cannot produce unless the thing be perfect: otherwise it is not above perfection. For if the perfect thing produces anything, then a fortiori the thing which is above perfection produces perfection, because It produces the perfect thing than which none of the things produced can be more powerful, more splendid or more sublime. For when the True One which is above perfection creates the perfect thing, *that perfect thing turns to its Creator and casts its gaze on It and is filled with light and splendor from It and becomes intellect (...).*³⁵

The comparison of *Arabic De causis* chapter 8 with the metaphysical teachings and philosophical vocabulary found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* gives solid grounds for locating the author in the *Circle of al-Kindi* and even for asserting that his own thought was formed in the conceptual context of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. The two samples from *Arabic De causis* chapters 5 and 21 give further support for the view that the unknown author found the Arabic texts of the *Elements of Theology* to be a valuable opportunity to expand and further the metaphysical accounts set out in the *Plotiniana Arabica*, not to excavate the metaphysics of Proclus in its own right.³⁶

35 My translation is a modified version of what is found in Lewis 1959, p. 291–293. This corresponds to the Arabic in *Aflūṭīn*, p. 134–135. The italicized text of the English translation corresponds to portions of the Greek of Plotinus in *Enneads* v 2, 1.6–8, as indicated by Lewis. Plotinus, *Enneads*, v 2, 1.8–13 (transl. Armstrong, p. 58–59): ὃν γὰρ τέλειον τῷ μηδὲν ζητεῖν μηδὲ ἔχειν μηδὲ δεῖσθαι οἷον ὑπερερρῦν καὶ τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο· τὸ δὲ γενόμενον εἰς αὐτὸ ἐπεστράφη καὶ ἐπληρώθη καὶ ἐγένετο πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπων καὶ νοῦς οὗτος. καὶ ἡ μὲν πρὸς ἐκεῖνο στάσις αὐτοῦ τὸ ὄν ἐποίησεν, ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸ θέα τὸν νοῦν. ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔστη πρὸς αὐτό, ἴνα ἴδῃ, ὁμοῦ νοῦς γίγνεται καὶ ὄν. “[T]he One, perfect because it seeks nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it. Its halt and turning towards the One constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect.”

36 For another good sample, see *Arabic De causis* Chapter 19. This and other similar examples will be discussed in edition of the Arabic now underway. It is worth mentioning that,

2 Brief Remarks on the Doctrinal and Historical Context of the *Arabic De causis* as a Product of the Circle of *al-Kindi* in Ninth Century Baghdad

The famous opening chapter of the *Arabic De causis* employs texts from Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Propositions 56 and 70, to elaborate a doctrine of primary causality that explains the manner in which the presence of the First Cause is found to be primary in each and every effect and cause in all reality below It.³⁷ There we find argued the philosophical principle that “the universal first cause” is more causally efficacious than any secondary cause since its causality with regard to any effect is presupposed by and prior to any lower secondary cause. Further, “the remote first cause is more encompassing and more a cause of the thing than its proximate cause.” The remote cause adheres more to the thing and does not separate from the thing with the separation of any secondary cause. Summarising, the author concludes,

Thus, it has become clear and evident that the remote first cause is more a cause of the thing than its proximate cause which is immediately adjacent to [the thing] and that it emanates its power on it and conserves it and does not separate itself from it with the separation of its proximate cause, but rather it remains in it and strongly adheres to it in accordance with what we have made clear and evident.³⁸

The sort of causation involved here is not Aristotelian efficient motor causation or the actuality of a preexisting potency, nor is it Aristotelian intrinsic formal or material causality. Nor is it the metaphysical efficient causality set out by Avicenna for whom the Necessary Being has only one essential act, namely the creation of Intellect as first created thing containing all the forms

while the *Plotiniana Arabica* can be viewed as a completion of Aristotle's metaphysics, the *Arabic De causis* can be seen as a complement to the metaphysics and cosmology of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. See D'Ancona 2017, p. 14 and 22.

37 See *The Liber de causis* (*Kalām fī maḥd al-khair*), p. 137–143. Cf. *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift*, p. 58–61; *Al-Aflātūniya*, p. 3–4. On this chapter, see D'Ancona 1999 and 2001. For the author of the *Arabic De causis*, this is a metaphysical form of causality and paradigmatic participation such that the being of everything is established by the First Cause alone. A form of this teaching is endorsed by Thomas Aquinas in his *Commentary on the Sentences* at Book 2, d.1, q.1 a. 4, sol. See Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, p. 25–26. This teaching is discussed in Taylor forthcoming.

38 See Taylor 2012 for a complete translation of Chapter 1.

for lower things. Avicenna speaks of two forms of *ibdāʿ* or creation. One is absolute creation *ex nihilo* presupposing nothing inside shared by the Necessary Being and nothing outside It. Rather, the positing of the Necessary Being immediately entails the Necessary Being's creation of Intellect. The other is a secondary sense of *ibdāʿ* on the part of what has been created presupposing a prior cause, scil., the creative emanation of intellects, souls and celestial spheres each depending for its substance and power on what is above it.³⁹ Rather, this causality set out in Chapter 1 and in later chapters called creation on the part of the First Cause as Pure Being and True One (Chapter 4), as well as True Agent (Chapter 19), appears to be a Neoplatonic blend of some sort of creative efficient causality and paradigmatic causality.⁴⁰ The First Cause as

39 See Janssens 1997, especially p. 470–476.

40 I say “some sort of creative efficient causality” because the author of the *Arabic De causis* contends in Chapter 4 that the First Cause creates directly only the first created being, scil. Intellect, and all other things through the mediation of Intellect. Here, then, there is efficient originary causality in the action of the First Cause in the case of Intellect. After that, however, there is mediate creation through Intellect, yet not such that the Intellect can be called creator. Rather, only the First Cause can be called creator. Further, the author says that the First Cause alone creates the being of all things while other causes act on things only “in the manner of form, not in the matter of creation” (Chapter 17). According to the author of the *Arabic De causis*, then, though there is emanative efficient causality on the part of the First Cause in the singular case of the efficient causing of Intellect, a paradigmatic causality of participation runs through Intellect, Soul and Nature such that the transcendent pure being of the First Cause is cause of the foundational being of all other things which are but diminished images or kinds. In a forthcoming article, D'Ancona remarks that “il n'est pas nécessaire que la cause opère selon la modalité de l'efficace. Non seulement dans le monde sensible il y a des réalités qui opèrent de la sorte, mais c'est la règle dans le cas des principes intelligibles qui sont les causes véritables de la structure rationnelle immanente dans les choses, et par conséquent de leur existence même. Telle étant la causalité immobile des intelligibles, un seul et même principe peut “produire” des effets multiples et divers, non pas malgré le fait qu'il demeure immuable, mais précisément grâce à cela. Si, comme c'est le cas, la causalité immobile et toujours égale à elle-même d'un principe intelligible se retrouve participée selon des degrés différents dans ses participants, cela s'explique par une différente capacité de réception de la part de ceux-ci.” (D'Ancona forthcoming.) For Aquinas, however, both efficient causality of being (conceived in terms of a distinction of existence from essence under the influence of Avicenna) and paradigmatic causality (found in the *Arabic De causis* and also in Chapter 5 of *On the Divine Names* by (ps.-)Dionysius) are involved. See Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, lib. 11, d. 1, q.1 a. 4, p. 25–26. The analysis of Aquinas surely draws on what the young Thomas learned in Cologne when he attended presentations of the *Commentary on the Divine Names* by his teacher Albertus Magnus. See Albert's commentary on Chapter 5 where he relates the accounts of (ps.-)Dionysius to the philosophical work of the *Liber de causis*, Avicenna and Aristotle. Albertus Magnus, *Super*

uniquely Pure Being, True One, and True Agent is the ultimate source for the being and unity found in any thing. As the first chapter asserts, the First Cause provides the formal substrate of being upon which other formalities are built.⁴¹ The First Cause as transcendent and unparticipated Pure Being is the cause of all lower beings by providing the participated perfection of being which is the foundation for other formalities at all levels.⁴² In this sense, other formalities provided by paradigmatic realities below the First Cause can be causes of rationality and life, for example, formalities that can be removed such that a human being can have rationality and life removed and yet still be a being, as rehearsed in Chapter 1. This must be read together with the second half of Chapter 31 in which the argument is made that there must be a True One which is the unique cause of every sort of unity in things⁴³ and Chapter 8 and others where the First Cause is Itself pure being without delimitating form. It is on the basis of the identity of the First Cause as Pure Being and True One and on the basis of Neoplatonic participation in the paradigmatic causality of the unparticipated transcendent paradigm and the participating lower image that the author of the *Arabic De causis* claims that the First Cause alone is the Creator.⁴⁴

Dionysius De Divinis Nominibus, p. 303–326. For more on these matters and causality in the *Arabic De causis*, see Taylor forthcoming. Cf. Taylor 2019, p. 344 f.

- 41 Taylor 1979, p. 506–507: “*Annīya*, translated into Latin from the Arabic as *esse*, is the formal substrate on the basis of which further perfections such as life and intelligence are received. In the *De Causis* there is no notion of being as the act of existence such as we find it in the thought of St. Thomas.” The term *huwīyah* as well as *annīya* has the sense of being. See Chapters 15, 17, 19, 31.
- 42 The account of the transcendent unparticipated, the participated property and the participant is set out by Proclus in Proposition 23, Proclus 1993, p. 26–27, and elsewhere in various forms in *The Elements of Theology*, such as Proposition 123 cited above.
- 43 “There must then be a true one which causes the acquisition of unities and does not acquire (its unity), while all the rest of the unities are acquired.” Chapter 31, *The Liber de causis* (*Kalām fī maḥd al-khair*), p. 275. This text remains the same in draft of the new edition of the *Arabic De causis*.
- 44 For my reflections on the nature and meaning of the teachings of the *Arabic De causis* here and in Taylor forthcoming I benefited from the account of the metaphysics of Proclus in Siorvanes 1996, p. 48–113. For more profound considerations on Neoplatonism in the *Arabic De causis* and the *Plotiniana Arabica*, several works by Cristina D’Ancona should be consulted. See, for example, D’Ancona 1992a, D’Ancona 1992b, and D’Ancona 1999. In D’Ancona 1999 (p. 67) she remarks: “J’estime enfin que l’auteur du *De Causis* s’est, quant à lui, abondamment inspiré de la paraphrase arabe de Plotin.” In this article she also argues that the influence of the writings of the (ps.-)Dionysius plays a key role in formation of the reasoning found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* and the *Arabic De causis*. Also see D’Ancona 1995 and D’Ancona, Taylor 2003.

This is the reasoned foundation for the teaching that the First Cause alone is the Creator that gives being to each and every thing, directly to intellect which is its first effect and mediately through intellect to soul, nature and all the rest of created things. Other causes act by giving form, but only the First Cause is the cause of being.⁴⁵ This philosophical account of primary causality, an account of creation as found in the *Circle of al-Kindi*, shows that the study of philosophy yields a conception of God as Creator without easily apparent discordance with the religious understanding that Allah⁴⁶ is the unitary Creator whose *Tawḥīd* or absolute unity permeates and grounds all other things in unity and being.⁴⁷ This metaphysical account found in the *Circle of al-Kindi* is part of what Gerhard Endress has insightfully described as part of a

programme *de propaganda philosophia*, which came into being as an ideology of scientists heirs to the Hellenistic Encyclopaedia, and as a religion for intellectuals compatible with Islam, ... a programme for the integration of philosophy and the rational sciences into Muslim Arab society.⁴⁸

It is precisely this that al-Kindī was proposing in his argument for the establishment of a central role for the foreign science of philosophy in the Islamic religious context of Baghdad. In his *On First Philosophy* he reasoned against unnamed detractors that room should be made for the study of philosophy inside the lands of Islam since philosophy too pursues knowledge of Divine *Tawḥīd* and creation. His reasoning is that philosophy should not be seen as an adversary to Islam but a co-ordinate and perhaps even co-equal way to seek out the fullest understanding of God and His creation. To this extent philosophy is properly seen as a companion to the religious teachings of Islam, sharing in the same end. In establishing the meaning and role of philosophy he writes,

The most noble philosophy of the highest degree is the first philosophy, by which I mean the knowledge of the first truth who is the cause of all

45 *Arabic De causis* chapter 17. *The Liber de causis (Kalām fī maḥd al-khair)*, p. 213–216. Cf. *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift*, p. 92–93; *Al-Aflātūniya*, p. 19.

46 See *Arabic De causis*, chapter 22, the sole chapter in which we find *Allāh*. *The Liber de causis (Kalām fī maḥd al-khair)*, p. 235–238. Cf. *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift*, p. 100–101; *Al-Aflātūniya*, p. 23–24.

47 On *tawḥīd* in the philosophical context, see Wakelnig 2015. Whether this account is fully in accord with literal accounts in the Abrahamic religions is another question to be addressed elsewhere.

48 Endress 2000, p. 569.

truth. The complete and most noble philosopher is therefore necessarily the man who comprehends this most noble knowledge, because the knowledge of the cause is more noble than the knowledge of the effect. For we only know each of the effects completely when we comprehend the knowledge of its cause.⁴⁹

He then goes on to explain the nature of the causes and to indicate that the term “first philosophy” is used of “the knowledge of the First Cause.” Such knowledge is obligatory since it offers inroads to knowledge and truth, regardless of its sources or previous practitioners in philosophy, inroads immensely valuable for the understanding of God and His creatures.

By knowing the things in their true nature, one knows divinity (*rubūbiya*), oneness (*waḥdāniya*), virtue, and, in general (*jumlatan*) everything beneficial and how to obtain it, and how to stay away from, and protect oneself against, all harm. The way to acquire all these is what the true prophets brought from God, great be His praise. For the true prophets (may God's blessings be upon them) brought the assurance that God alone is divine, and made [us] adhere to the virtues that are pleasing to Him, whilst forsaking the vices that are essentially opposed to the virtues and preferring the latter [to the former].⁵⁰

He then concludes his opening apologia for philosophy, writing,

We beseech Him who can see into our hearts—who knows our efforts to establish a proof of His divinity, to show His oneness, and to drive away those who stubbornly resist and disbelieve Him through proofs that refute their unbelief, tear aside the veils of their infamies and declare openly the deficiencies of their destructive creeds—to protect us and those who follow our path by fortifying us with His unceasing might; to dress us in His shielding and protective armour; and to grant us the aid of the edge of His piercing sword, and the support of His mightily victorious strength, so that He may thereby let us reach the end of our intention in aiding the truth and supporting what is right, and so that He may put us in the same rank as those whose intention He favours, whose action He approves, and to whom He gives triumph and victory over His opponents

49 Al-Kindi, *The Philosophical Works*, p. 10.

50 Al-Kindi, *The Philosophical Works*, p. 13.

who do not believe in His grace, and who deviate from the path of truth that is pleasing to Him.⁵¹

The first chapter and much more of the *Arabic De causis*,⁵² should be viewed in the context of this project by al-Kindi. What we find in that first proposition and others that follow are extracts from the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus chosen carefully to support a philosophical account of creative causality that may be read to coordinate well with broadly Abrahamic religious doctrine. That God is found causally present throughout all things of the universe, a religious doctrine common to the Abrahamic religious traditions, is reflected in the Qur'an in *Surat Qaf* [50:16] "And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein."⁵³ In the first chapter of the *Arabic De causis* the author uses the texts of Proclus to reason for the presence of any primary cause throughout all that it causes even down to the most remote of its effects. This is expressed as a principle to be followed throughout the work. This doctrine of primary causality insists that, in a hierarchy of causes and effects, no matter how remote the ultimate effect may be from the first cause in the hierarchy, the first cause is more intimately present to the effect than even the lowest and most proximate cause of the effect. This is because the First Cause, later in the *Arabic De causis* identified with Pure Being and the Pure True One, provides being as the formal substrate to which additional formalities can be added. In this sense the First Cause is the paradigmatic cause of the participated perfections of being and the unity in all things while Itself remaining transcendent. Again, this causality is not that of any of the four Aristotelian causes that largely concern the sublunar realm; nor is it the efficient causality of the Necessary Being according to Avicenna. Rather, it is that of a paradigmatic cause, Pure Being, causing lower things to have in themselves a much diminished formal characteristic of being as the foundation making possible additional formalities such as life and rationality. The doctrine is, of course, metaphysical since the being of the effect and the being and causal activity of all the intermediate causes are only owing to the first cause in the series. Spelled out philosophically in the first proposition of the *Arabic De causis* and others to follow, this is precisely what al-Kindi expressed as philosophy's coordinate role in the explanation of the nature and activity of the First Truth, God. Hence, the first proposition of this work on primary causality in

51 Al-Kindi, *The Philosophical Works*, p. 13–14.

52 See D'Ancona 1999.

53 <https://quran.com/50/16>.

conjunction with the later explicit discussions of creation and the identification of the First Cause with God provides a fine instance what al-Kindī referred to as a proper role for philosophy in the context of Islam. It is a philosophical text easily read as consonant with religious understandings of the Divinity and its causality and as such constitutes a proof and example of the value of philosophy to the apprehension of the meaning of Divine *Tawhīd*.⁵⁴

3 Concluding Remarks

The first of the two contexts of the *Arabic De Causis* presented here is that of the author as a follower of the *Circle of al-Kindī*'s new form of Aristotelianism developed through a transformed understanding of texts from Plotinus, *Enneads* 4, 5 & 6. He is himself forming a philosophical creationist account compatible if not supplemental to the thought expressed in the *Plotiniana Arabica*. The second context is that of a treatise formed to be congruent with Islam or generally Abrahamic considerations as part of the agenda of what Endress labelled a "programme *de propaganda philosophia*." The contexts of the *Arabic De causis* considered here were unknown to the many hundreds of readers of the twelfth century Latin translation and to the authors of dozens of Latin commentaries. Rather, Latin thinkers for perhaps as long as 90 or more years had no evidence for it to be anything but an Aristotelian treatise. For that period and even well beyond the revelation by Aquinas of its use of the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus, Latin thinkers found the *Latin De causis* to be an invaluable source of principles, analyses and arguments for a Latin form of Aristotelianism in many philosophical and theological studies, as Dragos Calma has shown.⁵⁵ Yet, as I have suggested here, the *Arabic De causis* is much more than an assemblage of extracts from the *Elements of Theology*. Read in its proper contexts, it is rather a philosophical product of the "Aristotelian" *Circle of al-Kindī* thoughtfully crafted in its reasoning and arguably aimed to contribute to the early positive reception of philosophy into the religious and cultural context of Islam in ninth century Baghdad.

54 For a more substantial study of al-Kindī's philosophical thought in his *On First Philosophy* and its importance in historical and religious context, see the valuable analyses in Ganag 2017.

55 Calma 2016.

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