A HIDDEN HAPAX LEGOMENON IN AVICENNA’S METAPHYSICS: CONSIDERATIONS ON THE USE OF ANNIYYA AND AYYYYA IN THE ILĀHIYYĀT OF THE KITĀB AL-ŠĪFĀ’

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Summary

A critical edition of the masterpiece of Avicenna’s metaphysics—the Science of Divine Things (Ilāhiyyāt) of the Book of the Cure (Kitāb al-Šifāʾ)—is much needed in order to assess the metaphysical thought of its author and the extent of his debt to Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition. The example discussed in the present contribution regards the title of the very first chapter of the work, in which the term anniyya (“existence”), common to the current printed versions of the Ilāhiyyāt, should arguably be corrected into ayyyya (“essential quality”). The proposed correction is corroborated by the apparent use of the latter term (equally misreported as anniyya in available editions) in other parts of the Šifāʾ, with particular regard to the reworking of Porphyry’s Isagoge (Madḥal), and sheds light on Avicenna’s preservation of an instance of Kindian terminology also in a work strongly dependent on Farabian patterns like the Ilāhiyyāt.

The present essay discusses the centre-piece of Avicenna’s metaphysics, the Science of Divine Things (Ilāhiyyāt) of the Book of the Cure (Kitāb al-Šifāʾ), a work in ten treatises constituting the fourth and final part of the most famous summa of logic, natural philosophy, mathematics and metaphysics by Avicenna. The Ilāhiyyāt of the Šifāʾ is fundamental in various respects. First of all, it is Avicenna’s most extensive treatment of metaphysics. Secondly, it is his presentation of this discipline most directly and massively related to Aristotle’s Metaphysics. Thirdly, it is one

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of Avicenna’s most influential works, since it was rapidly and extensively disseminated in the Muslim world, but soon afterwards it was also translated into Latin, thus exerting a deep and lasting influence on Christian philosophy. My aim in the present contribution is to show that a critical edition of the Ilāhiyyāt of the Šifāʾ is very much needed, by demonstrating how an apparently minimal correction of the text of this work can have far-reaching consequences for our understanding of Avicenna’s metaphysical thought, sources and vocabulary.

I have already shown elsewhere that our actual knowledge of the Ilāhiyyāt is based on a very small portion of the massive manuscript tradition of the work and that none of its printed integral versions (the lithograph published in Tehran in 1885; the current “edition” published in Cairo in 1960 by a team of four scholars; and the printed version published in Qum in 1997/8 by Ḥasanzādah al-Āmulī) meets the standards of a true critical edition.1 The corrections of the Cairo edition that I have provisionally proposed—on the basis of the collation of the text edited by G.C. Anawati, S. Zayed, M.Y. Moussa, and S. Dunya with a few other codices, the Latin medieval translation, and the parallel places in Avicenna’s Book of Salvation (Kitāb al-Naǧāt)—prove to be useful in various respects. They disclose, for example, further doctrines for which Avicenna depends on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, and they suggest corrections of the loci paralleli of the Ilāhiyyāt in other works of Avicenna. Furthermore, they show how locutions typical of later Arab authors have corrupted Avicenna’s original text, and they allow some ameliorations even in the otherwise excellent critical edition of the Latin Medieval translation of the Ilāhiyyāt.2

Many of the corrections that I have already listed and discussed are macroscopic like the change of the term huwiyya (“being”) in huwahuwiyya (“identity”), of the term wuǧūd (“existence”) in waḥda (“unity”), of the term musabbib (“causer”) in sabab (“cause”), and so forth. In the present contribution I will focus, by way of example, on a much more subtle—but
