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Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

The “Conjunction” of the Intellect with the Separate Substances and God: The Greek and Graeco-Arabic Background

Cristina D’Ancona*

In memoriam Werner Beierwaltes

Abstract

The Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato’s Cave assumes that beyond discursive reason there is in the soul a power to grasp the intelligible Forms and the first principle: the One, or the Good. In itself beyond knowledge, the One-Good is nevertheless present to the human soul as the ultimate foundation of knowledge which is made possible by the Forms. The perfect simplicity of the One-Good implies transcendence with respect to knowledge; however, the soul can have a grasp of it, provided that it raises itself to the non-discursive mode of knowledge which is typical of the Intellect – a separate substance whose nature is intellection. This Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato’s doctrine of knowledge reached the Latin Middle Ages through various channels and fueled the idea that our mind can indeed get direct acquaintance with the supra-sensible realm and its ultimate principle, God. Surprisingly enough, in the philosophical culture of the Middle Ages, both Arabic and Latin, this account was not seen as incompatible with the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, although the latter is based on abstraction from sense perception and does not grant any contact between the human mind and the Unmoved Mover. This article explores the roots of the medieval intermingling of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic epistemologies which occurs, in particular, in the theory of the “conjunction” of our mind with the intelligible realm. Based on Alexander of Aphrodisias’ exegesis of the *De Anima*, this theory originates in Arabic philosophy. Here Alexander and Plotinus merge together in the creation of the so-called *‘aql mustafād / intellectus adeptus*.

The pinnacle of man’s cognitive powers is not reason. Above it, there is a kind of cognition which has the same immediacy as sight and which allows those who can activate it to come into contact with the supra-sensible truths - even with God. Such an account of the ultimate perfection of knowledge is best exemplified by Dante’s *Paradise* XXXIII, 79-99, where the conjunction with God’s infinity is mentioned: *tanto ch’io giunsi / l’aspetto mio col valore infinito* (80-81: “till I made / my vision one with the Value Infinite”, trans. Langdon). This conjunction allows a human *mente* (97) to see directly the *luce eterna*. In the inner part of God’s eternal light the rational structure of the cosmos is visible, contained in a point of perfect simplicity: *nel suo profondo vidi che s’interna / legato con amore in un volume / ciò che per l’universo si squaderna* (85-87: “I saw that far within its depths there lies / by Love together in one volume bound / that which in leaves lies scattered through the world”, trans. Langdon). In the *Convivio*, our intellect (*mente*) features as that part of the human soul that

*I owe warm thanks to Silvia Donati and Concetta Luna. They have saved me from a number of errors; for those which remain I am alone responsible.

participates in the divine nature (*Conv.* III 11 14). Shortly after, Dante goes as far as to label it “deity”: *Onde si puote omai vedere che è mente: che è quella fine e preziosissima parte dell’anima che è deitate. E questo è il luogo dove dico che Amore mi ragiona della mia donna* (“So now we may see what is meant by mind, that distinguished and most precious part of the soul which is deity. This is the place in which I say Love speaks to me about my lady”, *Conv.* III 11 19, trans. Lansing).

Such a possibility granted to a human mind is, at first sight, the opposite of the Aristotelian account of intellection which is abstraction-based and gives no room to any cognitive contact between man and God. It is however well known that the Middle Ages bridges the gulf between the two philosophical traditions, even though their coexistence mostly takes the form of a demarcation between fields: while our daily knowledge develops in a way which can be analyzed in Aristotelian terms, both the *visio beatifica* of the disembodied souls of the blessed and the *unio mystica* of some souls here in this life can be conceptualized in the Neoplatonic vein of Dante’s verses.

One of the paths of this Neoplatonic heritage in the Latin Middle Ages was Proclus’ doctrine of the so-called *unum in nobis* explored by Werner Beierwaltes, to whose memory is dedicated this article. Beierwaltes shed light on the fact that while the mystical tradition mostly assumes that the contact with God is not a matter of intellect, rather of personal experience, the Proclean tradition transmitted in various ways to the Latin Middle Ages fuels the idea that what reaches the One is a cognitive power even higher than intellect.

Besides the Aristotelian and the Neoplatonic accounts of intellectual knowledge and its highest point, a third one spreads in the mature Middle Ages: the Arabic-Latin “conjunction” (*ittiṣāl*, *continuatio* or *coniunctio*) between our mind and the Agent Intellect. What is striking is that in medieval philosophy neither the Neoplatonic heritage nor the Arabic “conjunction” are cast as intuitionist doctrines of knowledge, opposed to and incompatible with the Aristotelian sequence of sensation, memory, experience, and intellection as outlined in *An. Po.* II 19, 100 a 3-9. Rather, the human soul is often seen as starting from sense perception and reaching, at its pinnacle, a cognitive contact with a self-standing reality independent of and prior to the concepts formed by abstraction. A modest homage to Werner Beierwaltes, this article collects some materials useful to explaining how all these accounts of knowledge merged together in the Middle Ages.

1. Beyond Discursive Reasoning: Beierwaltes and Medieval Neoplatonism

In a condensed contribution to the volume on the metaphysics in the Middle Ages issued from the 2nd Cologne *Medieviestagung* Beierwaltes called attention to an elusive, yet significant Neoplatonic doctrine that became part and parcel of medieval philosophy: the One is present in the human soul as the ultimate principle of its essence, knowledge (“als der durchtragende Grund seines im Erkennen seienden Wesens”).¹ For the Neoplatonists, he wrote, knowledge does not arise from sense-perception; rather, we know the things perceived because we possess in our souls the Forms which allow us to grasp the rational structure of these things. Now, if the One were indeed external to our souls, the Forms

¹ W. Beierwaltes, “Der Begriff des *unum in nobis* bei Proklos”, in P. Wilpert - W.P. Eckert (eds.), *Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter. Ihr Ursprung und ihre Bedeutung*. Vorträge des II. internationalen Kongresses für mittelalterliche Philosophie, De Gruyter, Berlin 1963 (*Miscellanea mediaevalia*, 2), pp. 256-66, here p. 259.

themselves would remain outside our reach, because the Forms always bring with themselves, so to speak, the One upon which they depend. The epistemological side of this metaphysical tenet is that identity is the *conditio sine qua non* of thought; hence, if the Forms preexist in the soul, so does their principle, even though few human souls are or become aware of this presence – exactly as few human souls are or become aware of the preexistence of the Forms in them. Since this Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato’s account of knowledge as recollection was cast by Proclus in iconic formulae which reached the Latin Middle Ages – τὸ ἐν τῆς ψυχῆς, τὸ ἐν ἡμῶν ἔν, *unum anime* or *unum in nobis* – Beierwaltes selected the latter to identify this doctrine.

If considered against the background of the Neoplatonic theory of the One, this is an oxymoronic doctrine indeed. The absolute simplicity required for the One to be the One does not allow us to qualify it by any predicate whatsoever. The One whose ineffability the soul discovers when it reflects about the fact that identity – namely, the principle which makes the predications possible – cannot be expressed in a predicative way is also that principle whose presence the soul discovers in itself, when it analyzes its own knowledge. This means that on the one hand the Neoplatonists place the One beyond knowledge; on the other, they grant our soul access to it: we can “awake the One-in-us”, says Proclus.² How can it ever be possible to combine transcendence and cognitive contact?

The idea that the First Principle cannot be known, let alone adequately named, antedates Neoplatonism.³ What is typical of Plotinus, whose treatises mark the rise of a new version of Platonism, is rather the argumentation which supports this claim. On the basis of the referential identity established between the ἀνυπόθετον of *Republic* 511 B 6 and the ‘one’ discussed in the second half of the *Parmenides*, Plotinus comes to the conclusion that it is here, in the *Parmenides*, that the reason why the ἀνυπόθετον is beyond being is given.⁴

² The formula ἀνεγείρειν τὸ ἐν ἡμῶν ἔν (“Der Begriff des *unum in nobis*”, p. 263 n. 63) is taken from Proclus’ *In Parm.*, col. 1072.7-8 Cousin = VI, 1072.7-8 Luna-Segonds and col. 1081.5 Cousin = VI, 1081.5 Luna-Segonds; see p. 260 and p. 275 of the “Notes complémentaires” and, for further passages where Proclus mentions the “One in us”, t. IV, p. 188, n. 3 (t. IV/2, pp. 494-5); t. VII, p. 200, n. 4 and p. 205, n. 7 (pp. 485-6).

³ The starting point of this topic is in all likelihood Plato, *Resp.* VI, 505 D 11 – E 2: ὁ δὲ δῖος δῖος μὲν ἅπασα ψυχὴ καὶ τούτου ἕνεκα πάντα πράττει, ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι, ἀποροῦσα δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς τί ποτ’ ἐστίν (i.e., the Good), coupled perhaps with *Tim.* 28 C 3-5: τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν. Cf. J. Whitaker, “Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology”, *Symbolae Osloenses* 44 (1969), pp. 109-25; Id., “Neopythagoreanism and the Transcendent Absolute”, *Symbolae Osloenses* 48 (1973), pp. 77-86; Id., “APPHTOΣ KAI AKATONOMASTOΣ”, in H.D. Blume – F. Mann (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für H. Dörrie*, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Band 10, Münster 1983, pp. 303-6, all of them reprinted in Id., *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought*, Variorum Collected Studies 201, London 1984 (same pagination). Cf. also F. Calabi (ed.), *Arrhetos Theos. L’ineffabilità del primo principio nel medio platonismo*, ETS, Pisa 2002 (Filosofia, 55).

⁴ E.R. Dodds, “The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One”, *The Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928), pp. 129-42. That Proclus’ *unum in nobis* depends upon Plotinus is clearly stated by Beierwaltes, p. 264: “In einer Darstellung der Geschichte dieses Begriffes wären die verborgenen Ansätze seiner Herkunft in der Philosophie Plotins zu zeigen, die die spekulative Entfaltung und Differenzierung des Problems durch Proklos allererst möglich machen. Der Geist sieht und erkennt sich selbst, indem es das Licht des Ursprungs in ihm selbst sieht und erkennt: das Licht vor seinem eigenen Licht (φῶς πρὸ φωτός, V 3, 12, 44). Dieses gibt sich ihm jedoch nur in der relationalen Einheit seines eigenen Grundes zu erkennen, das selbst Licht aus Licht (φῶς ἐκ φωτός, IV 3, 17, 13) ist. So ereignet sich die Erkenntnis des Einen in uns durch es selbst als dem im Denken vorläufigen Prinzip: ὡς καὶ παρ’ ἡμῶν τὴν γνῶσιν αὐτοῦ δι’ αὐτοῦ γίνεσθαι (V 3, 8, 41 sq.).

Once established that the 'one' cannot be associated with 'being', a necessary consequence is that it escapes knowledge in all its forms: there is no name for it, no discourse, science, sense-perception or opinion (*Parm.* 142 A 3-4), hence it cannot be named or known in a mode whatsoever (*Parm.* 142 A 4-6). Far from being a mark of failure, the impossibility to express what the 'one' is makes its transcendence evident, provided that the term 'one' is capitalized: the One is a principle, not a notion. Being the ultimate foundation of knowledge, this principle cannot be known, lest one is ready to start an infinite regress in search of a further ultimate foundation beyond it. Indeed, knowing means to grasp the nature of the thing known, and this implies comprehending the rational principles that account for it being what it is; now, all these rational principles have their foundation in the One, which as a consequence cannot be known.⁵ There are no further principles that account for the principle of identity. Thus, Plotinus rephrases Plato's ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας as ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας.⁶ For him in both the *Republic* and the *Parmenides* Plato is speaking of one and the same thing: the first principle.⁷

The other horn of the dilemma is the fact that it is the rational soul that reflects about such an ultimate principle; hence, the soul conceives of the One, stating at one and the same time that it cannot be conceived of. For Plotinus the solution of the riddle consists in realising that the object of predications such as that of 'principle', or 'good', or even 'one', is not the first principle itself, rather our relationship with it. What we say about the One counts as an expression of the necessary dependence of all that is not one upon it, by no means as a description of its nature.⁸ This shift from speaking about the One to speaking about our dependence upon it is both unprecedented in the Platonic school and conducive to a new topic in the history of philosophy: the so-called *via negativa*.⁹

⁵ On the medieval reception of this topic cf. H.-F. Dondaine, "Cognoscere de Deo quid est", *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 22 (1955), pp. 72-8.

⁶ J. Whittaker, "Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας", *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969), pp. 91-104 (reprinted in Id., *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought*, see above, n. 3).

⁷ A comprehensive presentation of the arguments in favour of Plotinus' interpretation of Plato has been offered by the late lamented Jens Halfwassen, *Der Aufstieg zum Einen. Untersuchungen zu Platon und Plotin*, Teubner, Stuttgart 1992 (Beiträge zur Altertumskunde, 9). First Halfwassen explores Plotinus' position; then he reads the *Parmenides* and Book 6 of the *Republic* in light of Plotinus' and Proclus' interpretation, coming to the conclusion that negative theology was already stated by Plato: "Das absolut Eine bleibt somit in der negativen Theologie der Ersten Hypothese selbst ungesagt. Wenn im Vollzug der radikalen Negation alles verneint werden muß, dann muß sich die ἀπόφασις in der ὑπεραπόφασις selbst zur Aufhebung bringen. Platon faßt daher im letzten Satz der Hypothese sämtliche Negationen in eine einzige zusammen: 'Ist es nun möglich, daß sich all dies mit dem Einen so verhält?' – Mir jedenfalls scheint: Nein' (142 A 7-8). Mit dieser letzten Negation hebt sich die negative Dialektik der Ersten Hypothese selbst auf, aber nicht in die Sinnlosigkeit, auch nicht in die Affirmation, sondern in das Unsagbare und in das erfüllte Schweigen von dem Arrheton: Nam per negari et ipse removit omnes abnegationes. Silentio autem conclusit eam que de ipso theoriam" (pp. 303-4).

⁸ VI 9[9], 3.49-55: 'Ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ αἴτιον λέγειν οὐ κατηγορεῖν ἐστὶ συμβεβηγὸς τι αὐτῷ, ἀλλ' ἡμῖν, ὅτι ἔχομεν τι παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐκεῖνου ὄντος ἐν αὐτῷ· δεῖ δὲ μηδὲ τὸ ἐκεῖνου μηδὲ ὄντος λέγειν ἀκριβῶς λέγοντα, ἀλλ' ἡμᾶς ὡς οἷον ἔξωθεν περιθέοντα τὰ αὐτῶν ἐρμηνεύειν ἐθέλειν πάθη ὅτε μὲν ἐγγύς, ὅτε δὲ ἀποπίπτοντα ταῖς περὶ αὐτὸ ἀπορίαις. "For to say that it is the cause is not to predicate something incidental of it but of us, because we have something from it while that One is in itself; but one who speaks precisely should not say 'that' or 'is'; but we run round it outside, in a way, and want to explain our own experiences of it, sometimes near it and sometimes falling away in our perplexities about it" (trans. Armstrong, vol. VII, p. 315).

⁹ V 5[32], 6.22-38: 'Ἀλλὰ ἡμεῖς ταῖς ἡμετέραις ὡδῶσιν ἀποροῦμεν ὃ τι χρὴ λέγειν, καὶ λέγομεν περὶ οὐ ῥητοῦ, καὶ ὀνομάζομεν σημαίνειν ἑαυτοῖς θέλοντες, ὡς δυνάμεθα. Τάχα δὲ καὶ τὸ 'ἐν' ὄνομα τοῦτο ἄρσιν ἔχει πρὸς τὰ πολλὰ.

This might suggest that the solution of the philosophical riddle consists simply in realising that what we know is not the One, rather its concept, namely a mental item corresponding to the philosophical claim that the first principle is necessarily simple. Quite the contrary.¹⁰ Indeed, if our notion of ‘the One’ were what we reach as the ultimate principle of the Forms, neither these nor it would be real: downgraded to abstractions, they would no longer grant the rational structure of the whole cosmos as they do in the Neoplatonic philosophy.¹¹

“Ὅθεν καὶ Ἀπόλλωνα οἱ Πυθαγορικοὶ συμβολικῶς πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐσήμαινον ἀποφάσει τῶν πολλῶν. Εἰ δὲ θέσις τις τὸ ἐν, τὸ τε ὄνομα τὸ τε δηλούμενον, ἀσαφέστερον ἂν γίνοιτο τοῦ εἰ μὴ τις ὄνομα ἔλεγεν αὐτοῦ· τάχα γὰρ τοῦτο ἐλέγετο, ἵνα ὁ ζητήσας, ἀρξάμενος ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ὁ πάντως ἀπλότητός ἐστι σημαντικόν, ἀποφύγη τελευτῶν καὶ τοῦτο, ὡς τεθὲν μὲν ὅσον οἶόν τε καλῶς τῷ θεμένῳ οὐκ ἄξιον μὴν οὐδὲ τοῦτο εἰς δήλωσιν τῆς φύσεως ἐκείνης, ὅτι μὴδὲ ἀκουστόν ἐκεῖνο μὴδὲ τῷ ἀκούοντι δεῖ συνετὸν εἶναι, ἀλλ’ εἶπερ τινί, τῷ ὁρῶντι. Ἄλλ’ εἰ τὸ ὁρῶν εἶδος ζητεῖ βλέπειν, οὐδὲ τοῦτο εἴσεται. “But we in our travail do not know what we ought to say, and are speaking of what cannot be spoken, and give it a name because we want to indicate it to ourselves as best we can. But perhaps this name ‘One’ contains [only] s denial of multiplicity. This is why the Pythagoreans symbolically indicated it to each other by the name of Apollo, in negation of the multiple. But if the One – name and reality expressed – was to be taken positively it would be less clear than if we did not give it a name at all: for perhaps this name [one] was given it in order that the seeker, beginning from this which is completely indicative of simplicity, may finally negate this as well, because, though it was given as well as possible by its giver, note even this is worthy to manifest that nature; since that cannot be heard, nor may it be understood by one who hears, but, if at all, by one who sees. But if the seer tries to look at a form, he will not know even that” (trans. Armstrong, vol. V, p. 175).

¹⁰ Beierwaltes, “Der Begriff des *unum in nobis* bei Proklos” (above, n. 1), p. 258: “Was aber ist der Grund der Möglichkeit, daß diese Einsicht gelingt? Oder – die Frage zielt auf dasselbe – was benennt das Denken eigentlich, wenn es das der Dimension der Sprache und des Dialoges entthobene Eine nennt? ‘Non illud vocamus sic nominantes, sed eam que in nobis intelligentiam unius’: nicht das Eine selbst nennen wir, wenn wir das Eine ‘Eines’ nennen, sondern den in uns seienden Begriff des Einen. Wenn wir hier *intelligentia* (νόησις) zwar zögernd, zunächst mit Begriff übersetzen, so deshalb, weil an anderer Stelle dieselbe Sache mit ‘apud nos de primo conceptus oder qui in nobis conceptus’ (νόημα) benannt wird”.

¹¹ Plotinus is adamant on this: what we are in touch with is the first principle, by no means a mental representation of it. See VI 9[9], 9.13–22: Ἐνταῦθα καὶ ἀναπαύεται ψυχὴ καὶ κακῶν ἕξω εἰς τὸν τῶν κακῶν καθαρὸν τόπον ἀναδραμοῦσα· καὶ νοεῖ ἐνταῦθα, καὶ ἀπαθῆς ἐνταῦθα. Καὶ τὸ ἀληθῶς ζῆν ἐνταῦθα· τὸ γὰρ νῦν καὶ τὸ ἀνευ θεοῦ ἔχνος ζωῆς ἐκείνην μιμούμενον, τὸ δὲ ἐκεῖ ζῆν ἐνέργεια μὲν νοῦ· ἐνέργεια δὲ καὶ γεννᾷ θεοὺς ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ τῇ πρὸς ἐκεῖνο ἐπαφῇ, γεννᾷ δὲ κάλλος, γεννᾷ δικαιοσύνην, ἀρετὴν γεννᾷ. Ταῦτα γὰρ κύει ψυχὴ πληρωθεῖσα θεοῦ, καὶ τοῦτο αὐτῇ ἀρχὴ καὶ τέλος· ἀρχὴ μὲν, ὅτι ἐκεῖθεν, τέλος δέ, ὅτι τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐκεῖ. “There the soul takes its rest and is outside evils because it has run up into the place which is clear of evils; and it thinks there, and is not passive, and its true life is there; for our present life, the life without God, is a trace of life imitating that life. But life in that realm is the active actuality of Intellect; and the active actuality generates gods in quiet contact with that Good, and generates beauty, and generates righteousness, and generates virtue. It is these the soul conceives when filled with God, and this is its beginning and end; its beginning because it comes from thence, and its end because its good is there” (trans. Armstrong, vol. VII, pp. 335–7). See also V 1[10], 11.1–15: Οὐσις οὖν ψυχῆς τῆς λογιζομένης περὶ δικαίων καὶ καλῶν καὶ λογισμοῦ ζητοῦντος εἰ τοῦτο δίκαιον καὶ εἰ τοῦτο καλόν, ἀνάγκη εἶναι καὶ ἐστὼς τι δίκαιον, ἄφ’ οὗ καὶ ὁ λογισμὸς περὶ ψυχῆν γίγνεται. Ἡ πῶς ἂν λογιῶνται; Καὶ εἰ ὅτε μὲν λογιζέται περὶ τούτων ψυχῆ, ὅτε δὲ μὴ, δεῖ τὸν <μ> λογιζόμενον, ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ ἔχοντα τὸ δίκαιον νοῦν ἐν ἡμῖν εἶναι, εἶναι δὲ καὶ τὴν νοῦ ἀρχὴν καὶ αἰτίαν καὶ θεόν – οὐ μεριστοῦ ἐκείνου ὄντος, ἀλλὰ μένοντος ἐκείνου, καὶ οὐκ ἐν τόπῳ μένοντος – ἐν πολλοῖς αὖ θεωρεῖσθαι καθ’ ἕκαστον τῶν δυναμένων δέχεσθαι οἷον ἄλλον αὐτόν, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ κέντρον ἐφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ἐστίν, ἔχει δὲ καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν ἐν τῷ κύκλῳ σημεῖον ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ αἰ γραμμαὶ τὸ ἴδιον προσφέρουσι πρὸς τοῦτο. Τῷ γὰρ τοιούτῳ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐφαπτόμεθα καὶ σύνεσμεν καὶ ἀνηρτήμεθα· ἐνιδρούμεθα δὲ οἱ ἂν συννεύωμεν ἐκεῖ. “Since, then, there exists soul which reasons about what is right and good, and discursive reasoning which enquires about the rightness and goodness of this or that particular thing, there must be some further permanent rightness from which arises the discursive reasoning in the realm of soul. Or how else would it manage to reason? And if soul sometimes reasons about the right and good and sometimes does not, there must be in us Intellect

The riddle would be solved, but the entire Neoplatonic universe would fade with it.¹² Beierwaltes phrased the Neoplatonic move to shift the statements about the One from the One itself to the relationship of its derivatives with it in terms of that “negative Differenz aus allem Seienden” to which he devoted a series of essays, gathered in the 1985 volume *Denken des Einen*.¹³ In the essay “Der Begriff des *unum in nobis* bei Proklos” the focus was on the medieval *Fortleben* of this doctrine, with special emphasis on the difference between the Neoplatonic *via negativa* and mysticism – if mysticism means irrationalism.¹⁴

All in all, the philosophical significance of the doctrine conveyed by the formula *unum in nobis* consists in implementing the Platonic assumption that true knowledge is provided by the Forms through the idea that the soul can go beyond the Forms themselves, and see their principle. The remote model here is obviously the cave of the *Republic*: not only can the prisoner who climbs outside the cave see real things rather than the obfuscated images inside it, he can also cast his gaze to the sun. At variance with the myth of the *Republic*, however, the Neoplatonists do not consider the ἀνυπόθετον to be the highest among the Forms (cf. τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν, *Resp.* VI, 508 E 2-3); rather, they place it beyond the Forms.¹⁵ If the soul can see their principle, this means for the Neoplatonists that it can get in touch with the One beyond Intellect.¹⁶ This interpretation of the *Republic* of course antedates the Middle

which does not reason discursively but always possesses the right, and there must be also the principle and cause and God of Intellect. He is not divided, but abides, and as he does not abide in place he is contemplated in many beings, in each and every one of those capable of receiving him as another self, just as the centre of a circle exists by itself, but every one of the radii in the circle has its point in the centre and the lines bring their individuality to it. For it is with something of this sort in ourselves that we are in contact with god and are with him and depend upon him; and those of us who converge towards him are firmly established in him” (trans. Armstrong, vol. V, pp. 49-51).

¹² Beierwaltes, “Der Begriff des *unum in nobis* bei Proklos”, (above, n. 1), p. 258: “Inwiefern sich allerdings der proklische Begriff von Begriff, insbesondere in bezug auf das Eine, von einem Begriff als abstraktem, fixiertem Denkinhalt oder als bloßer Vorstellung im Sinne eines Konzeptualismus, der nichts im Sein Wirkliches entspricht, unterscheidet, wird die folgende Überlegung zum Problem des Einen in uns, des in nobis unum, deutlich machen”.

¹³ W. Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen. Studien zur neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt 1985 (reprint 2016); Id., *Das wahre Selbst. Studien zu Plotins Begriff des Geistes und des Einen*, Frankfurt a.M. 2001 (reprint 2021); Id., “Le vrai soi. Rétractations d’un élément de pensée par rapport à l’*Ennéade* V 3 et remarques sur la signification philosophique de ce traité dans son ensemble”, in M. Dixsaut (ed.), *La connaissance de soi. Études sur le traité 49 de Plotin*, Vrin, Paris 2002 (Tradition de la pensée classique).

¹⁴ Beierwaltes, “Der Begriff des *unum in nobis* bei Proklos” (above, n. 1), p. 258: “Somit ist weder positive noch negative Aussage über das Eine als das Über-Wahre wahr. Die Negation hebt sich auf der Spitze ihrer Möglichkeit selbst in die Sphäre der ursprungshaft Über-Seienden, des Über-Denkenden und Unsagbaren auf, die sie durch die Setzung der negativen Differenz aus allem Seienden herausgesondert und so die Unermeßlichkeit und Unangemessenheit des Einen gegenüber jeglichem denkenden Maß einsichtig gemacht hat. ‘Die Negationen selbst vom Einen zu abstrahieren’ heißt also nicht, daß das Eine zu einem numinos-irrationalen Urgrund verflüchtigt werde, sondern daß sich das Nichts des Einen als die unhintergreifbare Grenze des Denkens und als unsagbarer Ursprung des Seins in immer unähnlicher Entsprechung dem Denken zeige”. As Concetta Luna remarks in her comments to the first draft of this paper, for Proclus the One is beyond intellectual knowledge but can be grasped by a hyper-intellectual form of knowledge, named ἐνθεαστική ὀρμή (*In Parm.* VI 1071.36-1072.5 Luna-Segonds).

¹⁵ M. Baltes, “Is the Idea of Good in Plato’s *Republic* beyond Being?” in M. Joyal (ed.), *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition. Essays presented to J. Whittaker*, Aldershot 1997, pp. 3-23 (reprinted in Id., *DIANOHMATA. Kleine Schriften zu Platon und zum Platonismus* hrsg. von A. Hüffmeier, M.-L. Lakmann u. M. Vorwerk, Teubner, Stuttgart-Leipzig 1999, pp. 157-99).

¹⁶ Beierwaltes, “Der Begriff des *unum in nobis* bei Proklos” (above, n. 1), p. 264: “Dieses Ereignis der Einung

Ages and, in the Middle Ages, the arrival of the Proclean formula *unum in nobis*; but it is the latter which, for Beierwaltes, resonates in Meister Eckhart as well as in Tauler, to merge together with the pseudo-Dionysian negative theology – on which more later. Far from being an instance of irrationalism, these late medieval accounts of the *unio mystica* inherit from Proclus – either directly or via Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite – the idea that a point of contact exists between the highest part of the human intellect and the First Principle beyond being: the *unum in nobis*, also labelled *apex mentis*.

2. Apex mentis

The Middle Ages came into contact with “mystical theology” in the 9th century with the appearance of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* in Latin translation,¹⁷ and Beierwaltes was of course well aware that the Dionysian version of negative theology had become mainstream since then. Proclus’ *unum in nobis* counts as another expression of the idea – aired everywhere in the *Corpus*, but especially in the *Mystical Theology* – that there is a power in the human soul even higher than intellect, and this power can unite with God. Ten years before the Cologne *Medievistentagung* where Beierwaltes presented his paper, the Patrologist Endre von Ivánka had published a long learned essay on the prehistory of the medieval *apex mentis*,¹⁸ and Beierwaltes addressed his readers to it for further research. The essay by von Ivánka unearthed a document dating from the end of the 15th century: the catalogue of the library of the Erfurt Cartusians,¹⁹ where the books are ideally ordered

des Entsprungenen mit dem Ursprung, des Denkenden und Nicht-mehr-Denkenden mit dem Nicht-Denkenden als seiender Grund und Substanz von Denken zu ermöglichen und zu erwirken, ist der Sinn des Einen in uns. Das Eine in uns zeigt die Anfänglichkeit und Entsprungenheit des Denkens im Einen selbst”.

¹⁷ B. Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of the Union with God. Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2015; E.S. Mainoldi, *Dietro ‘Dionigi l’Areopagita’. La genesi e gli scopi del Corpus Dionysiacum*, Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 2018 (Paradigma medievale. Institutiones, 6).

¹⁸ E. von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung eines stoischen Terminus”, *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 72 (1950), pp. 129-76. This was for him an example of that “Transponierung der antiken Gedankenelemente in die christliche Sphäre” (p. 131), to which he devoted the first part of his long essay. In the case of the human strive for knowledge of the first principle, the key of the transfer is for him Augustine’s transformation of the Platonic intellectual vision into *amor*, a transformation which paves the way for the medieval “mystisches Erkennen” (p. 144).

¹⁹ Von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung”, p. 147, refers to P. Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz. 2. Bistum Mainz und Erfurt*, München 1928, pp. 221-593; I owe to the kindness of my colleague and friend Concetta Luna the information that follows. The manuscript Erfurt, Bistumsarchiv, *Hist. 6* was compiled in 1475 by Jakob Volradi and another friar named *frater N*. The books of the library were ordered as a mystical ascension: “Innerhalb der geistlichen Dachkonstruktion wird zwischen einer Spitze, in der alles zusammenläuft, und den beiden großen Seiten des Dachs unterschieden. Den drei Dachteilen werden eine *prima*, *secunda* und *tertia via anagogica* zugeordnet. Die zwei Dachseiten stehen für die *secunda* und *tertia via* und werden aus den Signaturengruppen E und F gebildet, die zudem jeweils mit den Seelenvermögen *intellectus* und *affectus* verknüpft werden. Die Dachspitze bezeichnet die Signaturengruppe D, wobei diese auch mit dem *apex mentis* und der *synderesis* gleichgesetzt wird. Das Dach des *domus spiritualis*, repräsentiert durch den menschlichen Geist, und der spirituelle Weg, der mithilfe der Bücher in der Erfurter Kartause beschriftet werden kann, kulminieren somit in der Signaturengruppe D, der *prima via anagogica*, die mit einer eigenen Bezeichnung bedacht wird: Sie heißt *via mystica*”, says Lehmann, whose edition is still the reference work on the Erfurt catalogue. Lehmann, however, omitted some of its parts, which were studied later on: the so-called *Prohemium longum* has been edited by A. Märken, *Das Prohemium longum des Erfurter Kartäuserkatalogs aus der Zeit um 1475*, Peter Lang, Bern-Berlin-Bruxelles-New

as a *domus spiritualis sive edificium ipsius mentis humane* ascending from multiplicity to unity so as to reach the *summum cacumen sue simplificationis*. Here the human mind is ready, says the Cartusian monk Jakob Volradi, to encounter the First Principle: *in quo* (i.e. the *cacumen*) *omnium rerum principium attingat*.²⁰ According to von Ivánka, this formula echoes, together with the Neoplatonic legacy transmitted by the pseudo-Dionysius, a Christian adaptation of the Stoic ἡγεμονικόν.²¹ This adaptation was, in von Ivánka’s eyes, chiefly the work of Origenes. Not only did Origenes in his commentary on John’s Gospel endorse the Stoic account of a rational ἡγεμονικόν placed in the middle of our being, he also identified it with the Christian *Logos*: von Ivánka highlighted the ambivalence of this idea, because the *Logos* who “lived among us” (καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, John 1:14) coincides for Origenes with the Stoic *Logos* omnipresent both in the cosmos and in the human body.²² Transformed in this way into the divine *Logos* present in us, the ἡγεμονικόν / *principale cordis* was ready to operate as our point of contact with God.²³ According to von Ivánka, Origenes’ adaptation of the Stoic ἡγεμονικόν superseded the Platonic idea of continuity between the levels of human knowledge and its Christian versions – typically, Augustine’s *ratio inferior* and *superior*. Thus, Origenes created for von Ivánka a long-lasting model: that of an extra-rational power of knowledge innate in the human soul and waiting to be awakened by those who strive for union with God.²⁴

York-Oxford-Wien 2008. On the issue of the synderesis mentioned above and dealt with copiously in von Ivánka’s essay see M. Leone, *Sinderesi. La conoscenza immediata dei principi morali tra medioevo e prima età moderna*, Aracne, Roma 2020 (Flumen sapientiae, 13), here pp. 191-204 (Meister Eckhart).

²⁰ Von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung” (above, n. 18), pp. 147-8.

²¹ Von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung” (above, n. 18), pp. 152-3: “Wir sehen, daß alle die oben angeführten Begriffe erstmalig im Zusammenhang der stoischen Psychologie auftauchen. *Principale mentis* (ἡγεμονικόν), *apex mentis* (τὸ ἀνώτατον μέρος), *principale cordis* (ἡγεμονικόν als ἐγκάρδιον πνεῦμα), *scintilla animae* (ἀπόσπασμα des kosmischen Feuers). (...). Daraus ergibt sich aber noch eine weitere Folgerung: daß sich nämlich hier nicht nur um eine terminologische Abhängigkeit von der stoischen Psychologie handelt, sondern auch um die Übernahme einer entscheidenden gedanklichen Neuschöpfung der Stoa (gegenüber der platonischen und der aristotelischen Seelenlehre) durch das christliche Denken”. The footnotes 14-17 of p. 152 in this essay show that the account of the Stoic doctrine is oriented by Reinhardt’s presentation of Posidonius: K. Reinhardt, *Kosmos und Sympathie. Neue Untersuchungen über Posidonius*, Beck, München 1926. This influential reconstruction of Posidonius’ thought was destined to be substantially revised in light of the edition by L. Edelstein - I.G. Kidd, *Posidonius. The Fragments*, vol. I. *The Commentary*, vol. II, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1972 (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries, 13).

²² Von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung” (above, n. 18), p. 155: “Zugleich ist aber – das ist die merkwürdige Ambivalenz dieser Begriffe bei Origenes, die jeweils zugleich einen ontologisch-geistespsychologischen und einen religiös-heiligeschichtlichen Sachverhalt ausdrücken sollen – der *Logos*, d. h. die geistige Kraft, die “in unserer Mitte” steht (Jo 1, 26), obwohl er derselbe ist, der “im Anfang bei Gott war”. So ist der persönliche *Logos* zugleich das geistige Prinzip, das durch alle Geistwesen ergossen ist, deren inneres Geistprinzip dementsprechend (ganz im Sinn der stoischen ἀπόσπασμα-Lehre) als ein Teil dieses All-logos betrachtet wird”.

²³ Von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung” (above, n. 18), p. 156: “So kann es dann heißen: *Interiora velaminis, ubi inaccessibleia conteguntur, principale cordis dicemus, quod solum recipere potest mysteria veritatis et capax esse arcanorum Dei*. So bekommen auch die übrigen Begriffe, die ursprünglich aus dem Gedankenkreis der stoischen Seelenlehre herkommen, eine mystische Bedeutung und den Sinn eines tieferen, unter (oder über) dem Rationalen liegenden Erkenntnisvermögens für das Göttliche”.

²⁴ Von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung” (above, n. 18), p. 157-8: “Damit hat aber Origenes einen wesentlichen Schritt über den Platonismus hinaus getan. Indem er dieses ‘Vermögen des Göttlichen’ im tiefsten Grunde der Seele mit Ausdrücken bezeichnete, die die Stoa geschaffen hatte, um damit eine tiefste Schicht der persönlichen Entscheidung noch jenseits des Rationalen zu bezeichnen, hat er dieses Vermögen stärker, als der Platonismus es tat,

In the Middle Ages this topic came to merge together with the Augustinian and pseudo-Dionysian traditions of thought, both inspired by Neoplatonism. Von Ivánka was ready to acknowledge that the Neoplatonic influence was prevailing in the medieval statements about a cognitive contact between the human soul and God; however, for him it was the “Nachwirken der origenistischen Dreiteilung” of man as *ψυχικός*, *λογικός*, and *πνευματικός* which set the tone of the medieval *unio mystica*. Both Hugues and Richard of St. Victor, for instance, speak of an *acumen mentis* placed beyond the rational faculty of the human mind.²⁵ An outline of the mystical literature of the 12th and 13th centuries follows, which is meant to illustrate how this tradition of thought intermingles with the pseudo-Dionysian *intelligentia deiformis*.²⁶ The landing point is Bonaventure, whose itinerary of the human mind *ab imis ad summa* begins with sense-perception and culminates in the *mentalis excessus*, also called *apex mentis*.²⁷

It goes without saying that this account of the modes of the human knowledge is different from and incompatible with the Aristotelian one, both per se and in its medieval version. Suffice it to mention the widespread logical tradition of the Latin Middle Ages based on the late antique *Organon*, with its account of language as containing terms which refer to concepts in the soul, which in turn refer to items in the world. Together with the epistemological assumptions rooted in Porphyry’s *Isagoge* which became familiar in the Latin-speaking world through an uninterrupted chain of readers of Boethius’ translations,²⁸

vom rationalen Erkennen abgehoben. (...). Es liegt im Wesen des Platonismus, die Übergänge vom Rationalen zum Mystischen, vom Natürlichen zum Übernatürlichen zu verwischen und in der ersten Regung des Denkens und Strebens schon dieselbe Kraft als wirksam zu betrachten wie auf der höchsten Höhe der Erkenntnis und des Schauens. Wenn Origenes hier trennt und ein eigenes Seelenvermögen für den mystisch religiösen Bereich annimmt, so verwendet er dabei stoische Gedankenmotive”.

²⁵ Hugonis de Sancto Victore *De Sacramentis christianae fidei cura et studio* R. Berndt, Aschendorff, Münster 2008 (Corpus Victorinum. Textus historici, 1) I 10; Richardus de Sancto Victore, *De Contemplatione (Beniamin maior)* ed. J. Grossfillier, Brepols, Turnhout 2013 (Sous la Règle de Saint Augustin, 13. L’œuvre de Richard de Saint-Victor, 1), V 5.

²⁶ Von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung” (above, n. 18), pp. 162-9.

²⁷ Von Ivánka, “Wanderung und Wandlung” (above, n. 18), p. 169: “Ebenso ist bei dem hl. Bonaventura der *sabbatismus quietis*, der *mentalis excessus*, in quo oportet quod relinquuntur omnes intellectuales operationes et apex affectus totus transferatur et transformetur in Deum, nur die oberste Stufe einer *ascensio* (cap. 1), die von der Betrachtung der sichtbaren Schönheit und Ordnung des Geschaffenen (cap. 2) über die Selbsterkenntnis des Geistes (cap. 3) und das Erleben der göttlichen Gnade (cap. 4) zur Erkenntnis Gottes emporführt, zuerst als des ‘obersten Seins’ (cap. 5), dann als des ‘höchsten Gutes’ (cap. 6), und erst dann gelangt die Seele in das *mysticum et secretum*, quod nemo novit nisi qui accipit, nec accipit nisi qui desiderat, nec desiderat nisi quem ignis Spiritus Sancti inflammat (cap. 6)”. According to von Ivánka, this paves the way to Pascal’s idea of “Dieu accessible au cœur, non à la raison”.

²⁸ *Aristoteles Latinus* I.1-5, *Categoriae vel Praedicamenta (Translatio Boethii, Editio Composita, Translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka, Lemmata e Simplicii commentario decerpta, Pseudo-Augustini Paraphrasis Themistianiana)*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello, Desclée de Brouwer, Bruges - Paris 1961 (repr. Brill, Leiden - New York - Köln 1995); *Aristoteles Latinus* I.6-7, *Categoriarum supplementa. Pophyrii Isagoge, translatio Boethii, et Anonymi fragmentum vulgo vocatum Liber sex principiorum. Accedunt Isagoges fragmenta M. Victorino interprete et specimina translationum recentiorum Categoriarum*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello, adiuvante B.G. Dod, Desclée de Brouwer, Bruges - Paris 1966 (repr. Brill, Leiden - New York - Köln 1995); *Aristoteles Latinus* II.1-2, *De Interpretatione vel Periermeneias. Translatio Boethii*, ed. L. Minio-Paluello, Desclée de Brouwer, Bruges - Paris 1965; *Aristoteles Latinus* III.1-4, *Analytica Priora. Translatio Boethii (recensiones duae), Translatio anonyma, Pseudo-Philoponi aliorumque scholia*, Desclée de Brouwer, Bruges - Paris 1962 (reprinted with a supplement by J. Shiel, Brill, Leiden - New York - Köln 1998); *Aristoteles Latinus* V.1-3, *Topica. Translatio Boethii, Fragmentum recensionis alterius et translatio*

also the 12th century Latin versions of the *De Anima*²⁹ and *Parva naturalia*³⁰ formed the background for theories of knowledge inspired by Aristotle and exemplified in the Scholastic axiom *nihil in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu*. It is tempting to conclude that the two accounts of knowledge, the Aristotelian and the Neoplatonic, coexisted side by side never to intermingle with each other. It is also tempting to speculate that the Aristotelian model was meant to account for the knowledge of the embodied soul or, to use the medieval formula, for the human being *in statu viae*, while the Neoplatonic model worked well as a conceptualization of that supernatural status which, in centuries of exegesis of the Pauline vision of God face to face, was destined to become in the Middle Ages the so-called *visio beatifica*.³¹ This reconstruction, however, does not account for the continuity of the six degrees of knowledge which Bonaventure lists in an ascending order from *sensus* to the *excessus mentis*.³² On a larger scale, it does not account for the intermingling of the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic epistemologies typical of the medieval philosophers writing both in Arabic and Latin who claim, with different emphasis and often conflicting arguments, that our knowledge is indeed rooted in sense-perception, but at a given point of its development comes into contact with the intelligible realm itself. This is admittedly too wide a question to be dealt with in an article, but some steps can be outlined in the development of the idea that the human mind can ascend *ab imis ad summa*, to put it in Bonaventure's language. In what follows I argue that the theory of the "conjunction" of our intellect with the Agent Intellect is a case in point for the creation of a new theory, which depends upon the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic accounts of intellection, but does not overlap entirely with either.

3. *Intellect: a power of the soul, a separate substance*

A well-known Aristotelian conundrum is that on the one hand intellection seems to arise from our innate power to extract the qualities from the objects perceived,³³ while on the

anonyma, ed. L. Minio-Paluello adiuu. B.G. Dod, Desclée de Brouwer, Bruxelles - Paris 1969; *Aristoteles Latinus* VI.1-3, *De Sophisticis elenchis, translatio Boethii, fragmenta translationis Iacobi et recensio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, ed. B.G. Dod, Brill - Desclée de Brouwer, Leiden - Bruxelles 1975.

²⁹ Cf. L. Minio Paluello, "Iacobus Veneticus Graecus, Canonist and Translator of Aristotle", in Id., *Opuscula. The Latin Aristotle*, Hakkert, Amsterdam 1972, pp. 189-228.

³⁰ *De Sensu et sensato. Anonymus saec. XII vel XIII sive Nicolaus, translator Aristotelis*, Brepols, Turnhout 2011 (*Aristoteles Latinus* Database, Brepols = *Aristoteles Latinus* XIII.1).

³¹ Ch. Trottmann, *La vision béatifique. Des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII*, École Française de Rome, Rome 1995 (Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 289).

³² Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I 6: "Iuxta igitur sex gradus ascensionis in Deum, sex sunt gradus potentialium animae per quos ascendimus ab imis ad summa, ab exterioribus ad intima, a temporalibus ascendimus ad aeterna, scilicet sensus, imaginatio, ratio, intellectus, intelligentia et apex mentis seu synderesis scintilla", English trans.: Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum. Latin Text from the Quaracchi Edition*, new English Translation by Z. Hayes, *Introduction and Commentary* by Ph. Bohner, Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure University, New York 2002 (Works of St. Bonaventure Series, 2): "Corresponding to the six steps of the ascent to God there are six levels of the powers of the soul by which we ascend from the depths to the heights from the external to the internal, as we move from the temporal to the eternal. These six levels are: sense, imagination, reason, understanding, intelligence, and the high point of the mind, or the spark of conscience". For a comprehensive assessment of Bonaventure's ideas about knowledge see S.P. Marrone, *The Light of Thy Countenance. Science and Knowledge of God in the Thirteenth Century*, Brill, Leiden 2001 (Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 98).

³³ Arist., *De Anima* III 8, 432 a 3-10: ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐδὲ πρᾶγμα οὐθὲν ἔστι παρὰ τὰ μεγέθη, ὡς δοκεῖ, τὰ αἰσθητὰ

other it is described as the actualization of a potentiality, a process which depends upon an external agent.³⁴ Both accounts feature in the *De Anima*, and this suggests that Aristotle saw no inconsistency at all between them. However, the nature of the external agent and its interaction with the human faculty to intelligize did not cease to puzzle the Aristotelians from Theophrastus onwards.³⁵ The systematization of the theory of the νοῦς ποιητικός came much later, with Alexander of Aphrodisias.

Faced with the passage of Book III of the *De Anima* where Aristotle mentions a ποιητικόν at work in our intellection and compares it with what light does in our vision,³⁶ in his own *De Anima* Alexander adopts apropos this active principle another Aristotelian expression, in its turn quite enigmatic. He labels it νοῦς θύραθεν, echoing *De Gen. an.* II 3, 736 b 27.³⁷ This is not an unprecedented move: Theophrastus raised an aporia on this

κεχωρισμένον· ἐν τοῖς εἶδεσι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς τὰ νοητά ἐστι, τὰ τε ἐν ἀφαιρέσει λεγόμενα καὶ ὅσα τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἕξεις καὶ πάθη, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὔτε μὴ αἰσθανόμενος μὴθὲν οὐθὲν ἂν μάθοι οὐδὲ ζυνοίη, ὅταν τε θεωρῆ, ἀνάγκη ἅμα φάντασμα τι θεωρεῖν· τὰ γὰρ φαντάσματα ὡσπερ αἰσθημάτα ἐστι, πλὴν ἄνευ ὕλης. “But since there is nothing, it seems, that is beyond, separated from, perceptible magnitudes, it is in the perceptible forms that the intelligible objects are found – both those that are spoken of in abstraction and those that are states and affections of perceptible things. And this is why without perceiving, no one could learn or comprehend anything, and when one contemplates, one must at the same time contemplate an appearance. For appearances are like perceptions, except that they are without matter”: Aristotle, *De Anima*, Translated with Introduction and Notes by C.D.C. Reeve, Hackett, Indianapolis - Cambridge 2017, p. 58.

³⁴ Arist., *De Anima* III 5, 430 a 14-22: καὶ ἔστιν ὁ μὲν τοιοῦτος νοῦς τῷ πάντα γίνεσθαι, ὁ δὲ τῷ πάντα ποιεῖν, ὡς ἕξις τις, οἷον τὸ φῶς· τρόπον γὰρ τινα καὶ τὸ φῶς ποιεῖ τὰ δυνάμει ὄντα χρώματα ἐνεργεῖα χρώματα. καὶ οὗτος ὁ νοῦς χωριστὸς καὶ ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἀμιγρῆς, τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὦν ἐνέργεια. αἰεὶ γὰρ τιμιώτερον τὸ ποιοῦν τοῦ πάσχοντος καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς ὕλης. Τὸ δ' αὐτὸ ἐστὶν ἡ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐπιστήμη τῷ πράγματι· ἡ δὲ κατὰ δυνάμιν χρόνῳ προτέρα ἐν τῷ ἐνί, ὅλως δὲ οὐδὲ χρόνῳ, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὅτε μὲν νοεῖ ὅτε δὲ οὐ νοεῖ. “And in fact there is one sort of understanding that is such by becoming all things, while there is another that is such by producing all things in the way that a sort of state, like light, does, since in a way light too makes potential colors into active colors. And this [productive] understanding is separable, unaffected, and unmixed, being in substance an activity (for the producer is always more estimable than the thing affected, and the starting-point than the matter), nor sometimes understanding and at other times not”, trans. Reeve (above, n. 33), p. 55. – Reeve (above, n. 33), n. 364 p. 161, deletes Τὸ δ' αὐτὸ—οὐδὲ χρόνῳ, since this sentence occurs also at III 7, 341 a 1-3; he also deletes ἀλλ' in the sentence ἀλλ' οὐχ ὅτε μὲν νοεῖ ὅτε δὲ οὐ νοεῖ.

³⁵ Early in the history of Aristotle's school the ποιητικόν mentioned in the *De Anima* was connected with the admittedly enigmatic “intellect coming from outside” of the *De Gen. an.* II 3, 736 b 27, as documented by P. Moraux, “À propos du νοῦς θύραθεν chez Aristote”, in *Autour d'Aristote. Recueil d'études de philosophie ancienne et médiévale offert à Monseigneur A. Mansion*, Publications Universitaires de Louvain, Louvain 1955, pp. 255-95; see also Id., “Le *De Anima* dans la tradition grecque. Quelques aspects de l'interprétation du traité, de Théophraste à Thémistius”, in G.E.R. Lloyd - G.E.L. Owen (eds.), *Aristotle on Mind and the Senses. Proceedings of the Seventh Symposium Aristotelicum*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge - London - New York - Melbourne 1978, pp. 281-324, and J. Jolivet, “Étapes dans l'histoire de l'Intellect Agent”, in A. Hasnawi - A. Elamrani-Jamal - M. Aouad (eds.), *Perspectives arabes et médiévales sur la tradition scientifique et philosophique grecque*, Peeters - IMA, Leuven - Paris 1997 (reprinted in Id., *Perspectives médiévales et arabes*, Vrin 2006, pp. 163-74).

³⁶ Above, n. 34.

³⁷ Alexander Aphrodisiensis, *Praeter Commentaria Scripta Minora: De Anima liber cum Mantissa*, ed. I. Bruns, Reimer, Berlin 1887, pp. 90.9-91.4: ὁμοία δὲ τούτοις καὶ τὰ ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως, ὅποῦα ἐστὶ τὰ μαθηματικά. φθαρτὸς ἄρα ὁ τοιοῦτος νοῦς, τούτέστιν τὰ τοιαῦτα νοήματα. ἐν οἷς δὲ τὸ νοούμενον κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν ἐστὶ τοιοῦτον, οἷον νοεῖται (ἔστι δὲ τοιοῦτον ὄν καὶ ἀφθαρτον), ἐν τούτοις καὶ χωρισθὲν τοῦ νοεῖσθαι ἀφθαρτον μένει. καὶ ὁ νοῦς ἄρα ὁ τοῦτο νοήσας ἀφθαρτὸς ἐστὶν, οὐχ ὁ ὑποκειμένος τε καὶ ὑλικός (ἐκεῖνος μὲν γὰρ σὺν τῇ ψυχῇ, ἧς ἐστὶ δυνάμις, φθειρομένη φθίρεται, ἧ φθειρομένῳ συμφθείροιτο ἂν καὶ ἡ ἕξις τε καὶ ἡ δυνάμις καὶ τελειότης αὐτοῦ), ἀλλ' ὁ ἐνεργεῖα τούτῳ, ὅτε ἐνοεῖ αὐτό, ὁ αὐτὸς γινόμενος (τῷ γὰρ ὁμοιοῦσθαι τῶν νοουμένων ἐκάστω, ὅτε

point, wondering whether the intellect was an innate faculty of the soul or something that supervenes in us from outside. His solution was that it is “encompassed in the generation (συμπεριλαμβανόμενον)” of the soul.³⁸ Faced with Theophrastus’ doubt, Alexander had no problem with supervenience; indeed, he went far beyond it. Not only there is a νοῦς θύραθεν, it also is a separate substance, the highest. For him (i) the ποιητικόν of the *De Anima*, (ii) the “intellect from outside” of the *Generation of Animals*, and (iii) the divine Intellect of the *Metaphysics* refer to one and the same substance: the Unmoved Mover.

In his endeavor to explain how this principle interacts with our power to intelligize, Alexander elaborates more on Aristotle’s items (i) and (ii) – remember that when dealing with (iii) Aristotle makes no mention of any relationship whatsoever with our intellect, and *pour cause*, since (iii) is isolated and transcendent, with no contact at all with the sublunar world where the souls dwell. Still, Alexander is explicit in declaring that (i) is (iii). Apropos Aristotle’s analogy with light and colours, he explains that the separate Intellect, being in itself supremely intelligible, allows the enmattered forms to be intelligible.³⁹ Indeed, as the

νοεῖται, ὅποσον ἂν ἦ τὸ νοούμενον, τοιοῦτος καὶ αὐτὸς ὅτε αὐτὸ νοεῖ γίνεται, καὶ ἔστιν οὗτος ὁ νοῦς ὁ θύραθεν τε ἐν ἡμῖν γινόμενος καὶ ἄφθαρτος. θύραθεν μὲν γὰρ καὶ τὰ ἄλλα νοήματα, ἀλλ’ οὐ νοῦς ὄντα, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῷ νοεῖσθαι γενόμενα νοῦς. οὗτος δὲ καὶ ὡς νοῦς θύραθεν. μόνον γὰρ τοῦτο τῶν νοουμένων νοῦς καθ’ αὐτό τε καὶ χωρὶς τοῦ νοεῖσθαι. ἄφθαρτος δέ, ὅτι ἡ φύσις αὐτοῦ τοιαύτη. ὁ οὖν νοούμενος ἄφθαρτος ἐν ἡμῖν νοῦς οὗτός ἐστιν, [ὅτι χωριστός τε ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ ἄφθαρτος νοῦς, ὃν καὶ θύραθεν Ἀριστοτέλης λέγει, νοῦς ὁ ἐξωθεν γινόμενος ἐν ἡμῖν.] ἀλλ’ οὐχ ἡ δύναμις τῆς ἐν ἡμῖν ψυχῆς, οὐδὲ ἡ ἕξις, καθ’ ἣν ἐξιν ὁ δυνάμει νοῦς τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ τοῦτον νοεῖ. English trans.: A.P. Fotinis, *The De Anima of Alexander of Aphrodisias. A Translation and Commentary*, University Press of America, Washington, D.C. 1979, pp. 119-20: “Forms that result from abstraction, like the objects of mathematical thinking, are subject to the same conditions as these material forms. Therefore, the intellect we are here describing – that is to say, concepts representing the material objects – is corruptible. The case is different, however, when the thing known is by its very nature such that it can be the object of knowledge: an intelligible of this sort is impervious to destruction. It therefore continues to exist even when it is not being actually cognized, and the intellect too which has this intelligible as object of its intellectual act is also incorruptible. This is not true of [our] material intellect, the one that is in a subject; for this latter perishes along with the soul whose faculty it is, and when the material intellect goes out of existence, its capacity for knowing and the habitus which is its perfection are destroyed as well. But that intellect which is [always] in act became one with the pure intelligible from the very first moment that it began to know it, in virtue of the principle that in every cognitive act, the intellect, in its act of knowing, takes on a likeness to the thing known and consequently becomes itself of the same sort as the thing known. This then is that imperishable intellect which comes to be in us from outside. It is true that our other concepts also come from outside us; they however are not intellect in themselves, but become intellect only in the act of their being cognized. But this intellect is from outside precisely as intellect; for it alone among the intelligibles is intellect in its own being and not inasmuch as it is an object of knowledge. It is moreover imperishable, for such is its nature. And it is this intellect, as it is known within us, that is the imperishable intellect in us. [...] But neither [the intellect as] potency of the soul within us, nor its habitus [are imperishable], [even though] it is by means of this habitus that the potential intellect knows the imperishable intellect as well as other intelligibles” (the sentence bracketed by Bruns is not translated by Fotinis). There is another English translation of Alexander’s *De Anima*: V. Caston, *Alexander of Aphrodisias On the Soul Part 1: Soul as Form of the Body, Parts of the Soul, Nourishment, and Perception*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2012 (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle); it does not however cover the section on intellect.

³⁸ Moraux, “Le *De Anima* dans la tradition grecque” (above, n. 35); D. Devereux, “Theophrastus on Intellect”, in W.W. Fortenbaugh - D. Gutas (eds.), *Theophrastus. His Psychological, Doxographical, and Scientific Writings*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick - London 1992 (RUSCH, 7), pp. 32-43; E. Coda, “Themistius on Intellect. Theophrastus and Plotinus as Sources of *In De Anima* III 5”, *Studia graeco-arabica* 10 (2020), pp. 1-20.

³⁹ Alex. Aphr., *De Anima*, pp. 88.23-89.11 Bruns: καὶ ἐπεὶ ἐστὶν ὑλικός τις νοῦς, εἶναι τινα δεῦ καὶ ποιητικόν νοῦν, ὃς αἰτίος τῆς ἕξεως τῆς τοῦ ὑλικοῦ νοῦ γίνεται. εἴη δ’ ἂν οὗτος τὸ κυρίως τε καὶ μάλιστα νοητὸν εἶδος,

colours of the objects are potentially visible and become actually so only if there is enough light, also the *ἐνυλα εἶδη* are potentially intelligible and become actually so because of the supreme νοητόν, which is nothing more than the divine Intellect itself. This account parts company with Aristotle. It is true that the identity between the divine νοῦς and its νοητόν is an Aristotelian doctrine; as for the so-called “causality of the maximum” (in itself a Platonic tenet), it is endorsed also by Aristotle;⁴⁰ however, the reason why the separate Intellect is the supreme νοητόν is cast by Alexander in non-Aristotelian terms. In fact, nowhere does Aristotle say that the divine Intellect possesses in itself αὐτὰ τὰ νοητά, the true intelligibles, for the good reason that there are no such items in his universe. In Alexander’s *De Anima*, in contrast, the reason why the Agent Intellect is the cause of both the other intellects’ intellection and the existence of intelligible items consists precisely in the fact that the Agent Intellect has in itself αὐτὰ τὰ νοητά.⁴¹

τοιούτων δὲ τὸ χωρὶς ὕλης. ἐν πᾶσιν γὰρ τὸ μάλιστα καὶ κυρίως τι ὄν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι τοιούτοις. τὸ τε γὰρ μάλιστα ὁρατόν, τοιούτων δὲ τὸ φῶς, καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς ὁρατοῦς αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι ὁρατοῦς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ μάλιστα καὶ πρώτως ἀγαθὸν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀγαθοῦς αἴτιον τοῦ εἶναι τοιούτοις· τὰ γὰρ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ τῇ πρὸς τοῦτο συντελείᾳ κρίνονται. καὶ τὸ μάλιστα δὴ καὶ τῇ αὐτοῦ φύσει νοητόν εὐλόγως αἴτιον καὶ τῆς τῶν ἄλλων νοήσεως. τοιούτων δὲ ὄν εἶη ἂν ὁ ποιητικὸς νοῦς. εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἦν τι νοητόν φύσει, οὐδ’ ἂν τῶν ἄλλων τι νοητόν ἐγένετο, ὡς προεῖρηται. ἐν γὰρ πᾶσιν ἐν οἷς τὸ μὲν κυρίως τί ἐστίν, τὸ δὲ δευτέρως, τὸ δευτέρως παρὰ τοῦ κυρίως τὸ εἶναι ἔχει. ἔτι, εἰ ὁ τοιούτος νοῦς τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον, ὁ αἰτία καὶ ἀρχὴ τοῦ εἶναι πᾶσι τοῖς ἄλλοις, εἴη ἂν καὶ ταύτη ποιητικὸς, ἢ αὐτὸς αἴτιος τοῦ εἶναι πᾶσι τοῖς νοουμένοις. English trans. Fotinis (above, n. 37), pp. 116-7: “So that as there exists one intellect that is material, there should be too an intellect that is productive, which will be the cause responsible for the developed state which the material intellect can achieve. This intellect will be too that form which is intelligible in the supreme degree, the one that is completely independent of matter. For it is a general rule that in any order of reality, the being which best exemplifies the perfection of that order is the cause of there being other existents of that kind. Thus light, for example, is at once the most visible of all things and the cause whereby other visible things are visible; so too the supreme and highest good is the cause of goodness in other good things, since their goodness is measured by reference to the first good. It is therefore altogether reasonable that the supremely intelligible, one that is intelligible by its own nature, should be the cause of knowledge in other things; and if it is thus the cause of knowledge, it will be a ‘productive’ intellect. For, as we have argued above, if there did not exist some object that is by nature intelligible, then nothing else could ever come to be intelligible; and [as we argued just now] wherever beings are ranked according to their degree of perfection, a being of lesser perfection owes its existence to the more perfect being. Another argument rests on the assumption that the supreme intellect is the first cause, in that it is the cause and source of being for all other things. But this intellect will therefore be ‘productive’ by the very fact that it causes the being of all the intelligibles”.

⁴⁰ A.C. Lloyd, “*Primum in genere: The Philosophical Background*”, *Diotima* 4 (1976), pp. 32-6.

⁴¹ Alex. Aphr., *De Anima*, p. 89.11-18 Bruns: ἔτι, εἰ ὁ τοιούτος νοῦς τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον, ὁ αἰτία καὶ ἀρχὴ τοῦ εἶναι πᾶσι τοῖς ἄλλοις, εἴη ἂν καὶ ταύτη ποιητικὸς, ἢ αὐτὸς αἴτιος τοῦ εἶναι πᾶσι τοῖς νοουμένοις. καὶ ἔστιν ὁ τοιούτος νοῦς χωριστός τε καὶ ἀπαθής καὶ ἀμιγῆς ἄλλω, ἃ πάντα αὐτῷ διὰ τὸ χωρὶς ὕλης εἶναι ὑπάρχει. χωριστός τε γὰρ καὶ αὐτός καθ’ αὐτὸν ὢν διὰ τοῦτο. τῶν γὰρ ἐνύλων εἰδῶν οὐδὲν χωριστόν ἢ λόγῳ μόνον τῷ φθορᾷ αὐτῶν εἶναι τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς ὕλης χωρισμόν. ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπαθής, ὅτι τὸ πάσχον ἐν πᾶσιν ἢ ὕλη καὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον. ἀπαθής δὲ ὢν καὶ μὴ μειγμένος ὕλη τινὶ καὶ ἀφθαρτός ἐστίν, ἐνέργεια ὢν καὶ εἶδος χωρὶς δυνάμεως τε καὶ ὕλης. τοιούτων δὲ ὄν δέδεικται ὑπ’ Ἀριστοτέλους τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον, ὁ καὶ κυρίως ἐστὶ νοῦς. τὸ γὰρ ἄυλον εἶδος ὁ κυρίως νοῦς. English trans. by Fotinis (above, n. 37), pp. 117-8: “Another argument rests on the assumption that the supreme intellect is the first cause, in that it is the cause and source of being for all other things. But this intellect will therefore be ‘productive’ by the very fact that it causes the being of all the intelligibles. Now this productive intellect is separated, impassible, not mixed with anything else; all these properties belong to it because it is independent of matter. Its immateriality is the reason for its existing as separated, a reality solely for itself. No material form is separable except by an act of reason, since separation from their matter spells destruction

Another work by Alexander, or put together on the basis of Alexander's working drafts, proved to be much more influential than his *De Anima*. This is known as the *De Intellectu*, i.e. the second text in the collection of short writings labelled *Mantissa*, "Supplement".⁴² The two works concur on the main point, namely the idea that the ποιητικόν of the *De Anima*, the νοῦς θύραθεν of the *De Gen. an.*, and the divine Intellect of the *Metaphysics* designate one and the same principle.⁴³ However, the role of this principle in causing our intellection features differently in the two works. Instead of granting the intelligibility of the ἐνυλα εἶδη, as it does in Alexander's *De Anima*, the Agent Intellect of the *De Intellectu* enables the potential intellect, namely a faculty of our soul, to make them intelligible.⁴⁴

for material forms. The productive intellect is moreover impassible, because the passive recipient of action, wherever it occurs, is always substrate matter. And since the productive intellect is thus impassible and without any admixture of matter, it is also incorruptible; it is actuality and form that contains neither potentiality nor matter. Aristotle has proved, moreover, that the intellect possessing all these properties is the first cause, and thus intellect in the supreme degree; for a completely immaterial form is the highest form of intellect". The distinction between the enmattered forms and the true forms located in the divine Intellect was remarked by Ph. Merlan, *Monopsychism, Metaconsciousness, Problems of the Soul in the Neoaristotelian and Neoplatonic Tradition*, M. Nijhoff, The Hague 1963, pp. 9-84.

⁴² Edited by Bruns (above, n. 37). Cf. R. Sharples, "Alexander of Aphrodisias. What is a Mantissa?", in P. Adamson – H. Baltussen – M.W.F. Stone (eds.), *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, I, Institute of Classical Studies, University of London, London 2004, pp. 51-69. Fotinis saw no problem of authorship and translated the *De Intellectu* as an appendix to his English version of the *De Anima*. Subsequently, the authorship was challenged: cf. *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators of Aristotle. The De Intellectu Attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius' Paraphrase of Aristotle De Anima 3. 4-8*, Introduction, Translation, Commentary and Notes by F.M. Schroeder - R.B. Todd, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1990. An outline of the scholarly opinions is provided in *Alexander of Aphrodisias. Supplement to On the Soul*, translated by R. W. Sharples, Duckworth, London 2004; see below n. 46.

⁴³ Alex. Aphr., *De Intell.*, p. 108.22-109.1 Bruns: θύραθέν ἐστι λεγόμενος νοῦς ὁ ποιητικός, οὐκ ὢν μόριον καὶ δύναμις τις τῆς ἡμετέρας ψυχῆς, ἀλλ' ἐξωθεν γινόμενος ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅταν αὐτόν νοῶμεν, εἴ γε κατὰ μὲν τὴν τοῦ εἶδους λῆψιν τὸ νοεῖν γίνεται, τὸ δὲ ἐστὶν εἶδος ἄνυλον αὐτὸ οὐ μεθ' ὕλης ὃν ποτε οὐδὲ χωριζόμενον αὐτῆς ἐπειδὴν νοῆται. χωριστὸς δὲ ἐστὶν ἡμῶν τοιοῦτος ὢν εικότως, ἐπεὶ μὴ ἐν τῷ νοεῖσθαι αὐτῷ ὑφ' ἡμῶν τὸ εἶναι νῶ γίνεται, ἀλλ' ἐστὶν τῇ αὐτοῦ φύσει τοιοῦτος, ἐνεργεῖα νοῦς τε ὢν καὶ νοητός. τὸ δὲ τοιοῦτον εἶδος καὶ ἡ χωρὶς ὕλης οὐσία ἀφθαρτος, διὸ καὶ ποιητικός νοῦς, ὁ κατ' ἐνεργεῖαν θύραθεν ὢν τὸ τοιοῦτον εἶδος, εικότως ἀθάνατος ὑπ' Ἀριστοτέλους καλεῖται νοῦς. English trans. by Sharples (above, n. 42) p. 30: "It is the intellect said to be 'from without', the productive [intellect], not being a part or power of our soul, but coming to be in us from outside, whenever we think of it, if indeed thought comes about in the apprehending of the form, and (if indeed) it is itself immaterial form, never being accompanied by matter nor being separated from matter when it is thought. Being like this it is, reasonably, separate from us, since its being intellect does not come about in its being thought by us, but it is such in its own nature, being in actuality both intellect and intelligible. Form of this sort and substance separate from matter is imperishable. For this reason the productive intellect, which is in actuality a form of this sort being from without, is reasonably called immortal intellect by Aristotle".

⁴⁴ Alex. Aphr., *De Intell.*, p. 108.16-22 Bruns: εἰ δὴ τι τῶν ὄντων ἐστὶν ἐνεργεῖα νοητὸν τῇ αὐτοῦ φύσει καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τὸ εἶναι τοιοῦτον ἔχον τῷ ἄνυλον εἶναι, οὐ παρὰ τοῦ χωριζόντος αὐτὸ τῆς ὕλης νοῦ, τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐνεργεῖα νοῦς ἐστὶν ἀεί. νοῦς γὰρ τὸ κατ' ἐνεργεῖαν νοητὸν. τοῦτο δὴ τὸ νοητὸν τε τῇ αὐτοῦ φύσει καὶ κατ' ἐνεργεῖαν νοῦς, αἴτιον γινόμενον τῷ ὑλικῷ νῶ τοῦ κατὰ τὴν πρὸς τὸ τοιοῦτο εἶδος ἀναφορὰν χωρίζειν τε καὶ μιμεῖσθαι καὶ νοεῖν καὶ τῶν ἐνύλων εἰδῶν ἕκαστον καὶ ποιεῖν νοητὸν αὐτό. English trans. by Sharples (above, n. 42), pp. 29-30: "If then there is any of the extant things that is intelligible in actuality in its own nature, and because it is immaterial possesses of itself the [property] of being such, not deriving it from an intellect that separates it from matter, such a thing is intellect in actuality always. For what is intelligible in actuality is intellect. This thing that is both intelligible in its own nature and intellect in actuality comes to be the cause of the material intellect's, by reference to such a form, separating and imitating and thinking of the enmattered forms as well, and making it intelligible".

The difference between the two accounts was noticed in 1942 by Paul Moraux,⁴⁵ who also challenged the authorship of the *De Intellectu*.⁴⁶ Nowadays there is general scholarly agreement that the latter is indeed by Alexander in the sense that it was written by him,⁴⁷

⁴⁵ P. Moraux, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise exégète de la noétique d'Aristote*, Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres - Librairie Droz, Liège - Paris 1942, pp. 109-42, called attention to the fact that in Alexander's *De Anima* the divine νοῦς gives to the enmattered forms their intelligibility, while in the *De Intellectu* it grants to the potential intellect the power of abstraction: "ce n'est plus sur l'objet de connaissance qu'agit l'intellect agent, mais bien sur le sujet connaissant (...). Il ne fait aucun doute que le *De Anima* et le *De Intellectu* appartiennent bien à une même veine en ce sens qu'ils incarnent une même tendance de l'exégèse aristotélicienne et qu'ils s'opposent ainsi à d'autres courants du péripatétisme (...). En effet, une foule de traits communs confèrent aux deux ouvrages une physionomie particulière: ce sont essentiellement la croyance à l'unité et à la transcendance du νοῦς ποιητικός, son assimilation à l'intellect divin, l'attribution à l'intelligence humaine de tous les actes de connaissance, abstraction y compris, et finalement la qualification de νοῦς θύραθεν appliquée à la Divinité en tant qu'elle entre en rapport avec l'intelligence humaine. Ces traits fondamentaux, qui ont caractérisé le mouvement alexandriste au long de son évolution, se retrouvent à la fois dans le *De Anima* et dans le *De Intellectu*; on peut donc conclure à une affinité certaine entre les deux systèmes exposés dans ces écrits. Mais dans ces cadres généraux identiques s'insèrent de notables divergences. (...) Cette conception différente entraîne à son tour une modification dans l'action du νοῦς ποιητικός: dans la perspective du *De Anima*, ce dernier jouait, dans la connaissance humaine, le rôle de cause éloignée, en conférant, au titre de premier intelligible, un principe d'intelligibilité aux êtres dépendant de lui; cette causalité divine se renforce dans le *De Intellectu*, puisque, selon ce traité, le νοῦς ποιητικός communique au νοῦς ὑλικός la ἐξίς νοητική qui lui permet d'abstraire" (pp. 126 and 132-3).

⁴⁶ Moraux, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise* (above, n. 45), pp. 135 and 136-7: "Reconnaissons-le: si l'Exégète était l'auteur des deux traités, il aurait vraisemblablement tenté de justifier, fût-ce d'une manière assez concise, son changement d'attitude. (...) Pour nous résumer, disons que l'un des deux traités ne constitue pas le développement de l'autre; que rien ne permet de considérer l'un comme une correction de l'autre; enfin, que les termes techniques de première importance y sont employés dans des sens nettement différents. Ces constatations nous autorisent à affirmer que les deux ouvrages ne correspondent pas à deux étapes de la pensée d'Alexandre, mais qu'ils s'opposent entre eux comme des productions d'auteurs différents". B.C. Bazán, "L'authenticité du *De Intellectu* attribué à Alexandre d'Aphrodise", *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 71 (1973), pp. 468-87, pointed to Alexander's attempt at solving a major problem of his *De Anima*, namely, the fact that the abstraction is attributed to the νοῦς ὑλικός, which however is a mere potentiality; hence in the *De Intellectu* Alexander made the Agent Intellect impart the abstractive power to the potential intellect. Bazán's argument sounded convincing to Moraux, who in his 1978 study "Le *De Anima* dans la tradition grecque" (above, n. 35) accepted Alexander's authorship; however, at variance with Bazán, who had considered the *De Intellectu* as a revision of the *De Anima*, Moraux understood it as a draft superseded by the more mature *De Anima*. According to Fotinis, p. 322, "there does not seem to be any contradiction between the noetic operations that the productive intellect has in each treatise". In contrast, F.M. Schroeder, "The Potential or Material Intellect and the Authorship of the *De Intellectu*. A Reply to B. C. Bazán", *Symbolae Osloenses* 57 (1982), pp. 115-25, contends that this treatise is not by Alexander, rather by a later unknown author who combined Alexander's and Plotinus' accounts of intellection. See also Id., "The Provenance of the *De Intellectu* attributed to Alexander of Aphrodisias", *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), pp. 105-20. For P. Accattino, Alessandro di Afrodisia, *De Intellectu*, introduzione, testo greco rivisto, traduzione e commento, Thélème, Torino 2001, the *De Intellectu* is genuine but results from distinct pieces of work written early in Alexander's career; Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias. Supplement to On the Soul* (above, n. 42) concurs with him; see the note below.

⁴⁷ Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias. Supplement to On the Soul* (above, n. 42), p. 2: "Accattino 2001 persuasively argues that § 2, *On Intellect*, which has historically been the most influential of the entire collection, is an early work by Alexander. It is composed of three originally separate sections, of which the first (A) is an exposition of Alexander's doctrine of intellect, developed and in important respects modified in his later *DA*, while the second and third sections (B and C) record treatments of the topic which he heard in school discussion, probably from one of his teachers, followed in B by his own development of the argument and in C by his rejection of it". For a different opinion (the author of the *De Intellectu* combines Alexander's views and Neoplatonism) see F.M. Schroeder - R.B. Todd, "The *De Intellectu* Revisited", *Laval théologique et philosophique* 64 (2008), pp. 663-80.

but not however in the sense that it was a treatise that he had refined for publication. It is the *De Intellectu*, and especially its final part, that forms the background for the rise of the topic of the “conjunction” between the human and divine minds. This topic had its remote origins within the context of the early translations from Greek into Arabic carried out in the first half of the 9th century. Between the end of the century and the beginning of the 10th a decisive step in the history of the Aristotelian psychology in Arabic was made: the translation of Alexander’s *De Intellectu*. The topic became crucial in the subsequent developments of Arabic-Islamic philosophy from al-Fārābī (d. 950 AD) onwards. A full-fledged analysis cannot be provided in this article; I will nevertheless try to outline the genesis of this topic as it occurs in the Arabic version of the *De Intellectu*.

4. “Conjunction”: the Graeco-Arabic Background

As mentioned above, the *De Intellectu* falls into three parts. The first (labelled Section A) contains Alexander’s ideas, while the second and third (Sections B and C) respectively present and discuss the position of another philosopher whose identity has been the subject of a prolonged scholarly controversy.⁴⁸ In his endeavor to solve the difficulties raised about the νοῦς θύραθεν, this philosopher advances a solution of his own. The objections against Aristotle he has to face are based on two contrasting features which derive from the *De Gen. an.* on the one hand, and the *Metaphysics* on the other. We know from the *Metaphysics* that the divine Intellect is incorporeal; but we are also told in the *De Gen. an.* that the intellect comes to be in us “from outside”. How is this possible, given that an incorporeal entity cannot be in a place nor move from place to place? The solution offered by this philosopher is that the Intellect does not ‘move’: it is already present in matter as an οὐσία in another οὐσία. Being intellect in actuality, ἐνεργεία, it operates uninterruptedly. Its action consists in activating the potentiality of our souls to intelligize: when such a pure actuality intermingles with our potentiality, intellection arises. In the opinion of this scholar, our potentiality to intelligize is a sort of tool utilized by the divine Intellect.

Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Intellect*, p. 112.5-21 Bruns

βουλόμενος δὲ τὸν νοῦν ἀθάνατον δεικνύουσι καὶ φεύγειν τὰς ἀπορίας ἃς ἐπιφέρουσιν τῷ θύραθεν νόῳ ἀνάγκη ἔχοντι τόπον ἀλλάττειν, οὐ δυναμένῳ δέ, εἰ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἀσώματος, οὔτε ἐν τόπῳ εἶναι οὔτε μεταβαίνειν καὶ ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλῳ γίνεσθαι, κατ’ ἰδίαν ἐπίνοιαν ἔλεγε τοιαῦτα περὶ τοῦ νοῦ ἐν παντὶ εἶναι τῷ θνητῷ λεγομένου σώματι. καὶ δὴ ἔφασκεν τὸν νοῦν καὶ ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ ὡς οὐσίαν ἐν οὐσίᾳ καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ εἶναι αἰεὶ ἐνεργοῦντα τὰς αὐτοῦ ἐνεργείας. ὅταν μὲν οὖν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ κραθέντος πῦρ γένηται ἢ τι τοιοῦτον ἐκ τῆς μίξεως, ὡς καὶ ὄργανον δύνασθαι τῷ νόῳ τούτῳ παρασχεῖν, ὅς ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ μίγματι τούτῳ (διότι ἐστὶν ἐν παντὶ σώματι, σῶμα δὲ καὶ τοῦτο), τοῦτο τὸ ὄργανον δυνάμει νοῦς λέγεται ἐπιτήδειός τις δύναμις ἐπὶ τῇ τοιαύτῃ κράσει τῶν σωμάτων γινομένη πρὸς τὸ δέξασθαι τὸν ἐνεργείᾳ νοῦν. ὅταν δὲ τούτου τοῦ ὄργάνου λάβηται, τότε καὶ ὡς δι’ ὄργάνου καὶ ὡς περὶ ὕλην καὶ ὡς δι’ ὕλης ἐνήργησεν, καὶ τότε λεγόμεθα νοεῖν ἡμεῖς. ὁ γὰρ ἡμέτερος νοῦς σύνθετός ἐστιν ἐκ τε τῆς δυνάμεως, ἣτις ὄργανόν ἐστι τοῦ θείου νοῦ, ὃν δυνάμει νοῦν ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης καλεῖ, καὶ τῆς ἐκείνου ἐνεργείας. ὣν θατέρου μὴ παρόντος ἀδύνατον ἡμᾶς νοεῖν.

⁴⁸ See the preceding note. The three parts are subdivided as follows: Section A: pp. 106.19-110.3 Bruns; Section B: pp. 110.4-112.5; Section C: pp. 112.5-113.24.

He wanted to show that the intellect is immortal, and to avoid the difficulties which they bring against the ‘intellect from without’ which must necessarily change its place but cannot, if it is incorporeal, either be in place or change its place and be in different places at different times. So, following his own individual idea, he said things like the following about the intellect that was said to be in every mortal body. He said that intellect is in matter as one substance in another substance and [is so] in actuality, and always performs its own activities. When, from the body that was blended, there comes to be fire or something of this sort as the result of the mixture – for it is in every body, and this too is a body – then this instrument is said to be intellect potentially, supervening on this sort of blending of bodies as a suitable potentiality for receiving the intellect that is in actuality. When [the intellect that is in actuality] takes hold of this instrument, then it is active as through an instrument and in relation to matter as through matter, and then we are said to think. For our intellect is composed of the potentiality, which is the instrument of the divine intellect [and] which Aristotle calls intellect in potentiality, and of the activity of that [divine intellect]. And if either of these is not present it is impossible for us to think (trans. Sharples, pp. 39-40).

It goes without saying that Alexander cannot share such an account of the interaction between the Agent Intellect and our intellectual power, and he is wary of stating from the outset that, far from being a reliable account of the Aristotelian position, this is an *ἰδία ἐπίνοια*, a personal opinion which misses Aristotle’s point in many respects. The attempts at identifying the philosopher Alexander is alluding to and the understanding of the nature of the *De Intellectu* go hand in hand, because it is chiefly on the grounds of his reply that this work has been increasingly seen as a draft for personal use, rather than as a treatise submitted to *ekdosis* by its author.⁴⁹ Indeed, the beginning of the passage quoted above is abrupt and the best candidate for the philosopher whose positions are criticized is an “Aristotle” who had been mentioned earlier in the text, at the beginning of the so-called Section B.⁵⁰ This “Aristotle” cannot be Aristotle of Stagira. Not only does Alexander say to have “heard” him uttering such doctrines – clearly impossible unless one is ready to take loosely the verb “to hear”.⁵¹ There is a much more compelling reason: his position

⁴⁹ Accattino, Alessandro di Afrodisia, *De Intellectu*, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁰ The sentence (p. 110.4, Bruns) is as follows: Ἦκουσα δὲ περὶ νοῦ τοῦ θύραθεν παρὰ τὸ Ἀριστοτέλους, ἃ διεσωσάμην Following the interpretation of this passage advanced by J. Opsomer – R. Sharples, “Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Intellectu* 110.4: “I Heard This from Aristotle’. A Modest Proposal”, *The Classical Quarterly* 50 (2000), pp. 252-6, Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias. Supplement to On the Soul* (above, n. 42), p. 32 translates: “I also heard about the intellect from without from Aristotle [things] which I preserved”. The alternate translation, which makes the problem evident, runs: “I also heard from Aristotle things about the intellect from without, which I preserved”. This translation, which renders more literally the flow of the Greek sentence and construes ἀκούειν with παρὰ, entails the impossibility of identifying “Aristotle” with Aristotle of Stagira, because Alexander could not have “heard” anything “from him”. Various attempts have been made to solve the riddle. They go from interpreting loosely “hearing from” to searching for another “Aristotle”. In this second case, the best candidate is Aristotle of Mitylene, the teacher of Alexander of Aphrodisias. This solution was proposed, independently of one another, by P. Moraux, “Aristoteles, der Lehrer Alexander von Aphrodisias”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 49 (1967), pp. 169-82, and P. Accattino, “Alessandro di Afrodisia e Aristotele di Mitilene”, *Elenchos* 6 (1985), pp. 67-74.

⁵¹ For this problem various solutions have been proposed: see Opsomer - Sharples, “Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Intellectu* 110.4” and Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias. Supplement to On the Soul* (above, n. 42), p. 38 n. 92.

is criticized by Alexander, something that does not tally with the latter’s stance towards Aristotle.⁵² Hence, one is left wondering who held these ideas. Interesting as this question may be, it cannot retain us here, because the key point in the genesis of the topic of the “conjunction” between our intellect and the Agent Intellect consists precisely in the fact that the puzzling features mentioned above are lacking in the Arabic version.

As we have just seen, what alerted the scholars to the problems of the final part of the *De Intellectu* (Section C) was the sentence (beginning of Section B) where Alexander reports to have “heard” Aristotle’s account and, immediately afterwards, repeats somehow unnaturally the name “Aristotle”.⁵³ In the Arabic version of this passage, instead, both difficulties are watered down.

It is only natural that the first problem – that of the beginning of our Section B – did not trouble the translator, Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn (d. 910 AD). The scion of a family of Christian learned doctors and translators which became prominent in Baghdad thanks to his father Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (d. 873 AD), Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn played a crucial role in the transmission of Aristotle’s works and commentaries on them.⁵⁴ Although he was well-versed in the Aristotelian tradition and particularly interested in the *De Anima*,⁵⁵ he was definitely not in a position to notice that there was something strange in the claim that Alexander of Aphrodisias “heard” Aristotle’s teaching. In all likelihood Ishāq was in the dark about the span of time in centuries between the master and his exegete.⁵⁶ As for the

⁵² At the beginning of his *De Anima*, p. 2.4-9 Bruns, Alexander says in as many words that what Aristotle says is unconditionally true and that he will stick to his teaching: “Just as I have great reverence for Aristotle’s works on other subjects, since I find more truth in the views passed down from him than in what others have claimed, I regard what he states in his theory of the soul in the same way as well. I will therefore have fulfilled my aim if I can set out his claims about the soul as clearly as possible and offer suitable arguments to show how each of them is well formulated” (trans. Caston, above n. 37, p. 31).

⁵³ Alex. Aphr., *De Intell.*, p. 110.5-6 Bruns: τὰ γὰρ κινήσαντα Ἀριστοτέλη εἰσαγαγεῖν τὸν θύραθεν νοῦν, ταῦτα ἐλέγετο εἶναι. English trans. by Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias. Supplement to On the Soul* (above, n. 42), p. 32: “The things that prompted Aristotle to introduce the intellect from without were said to be these”. Were the two Aristotle of lines 4 and 5 one and the same, the pronoun “he” would be expected to replace the name ‘Aristotle’ in the second occurrence. Furthermore, this sentence refers clearly to an exegesis of the doctrine of the intellect from outside. This tips the scale towards the distinction between the two “Aristotle” – Aristotle of Mitylene, the teacher of Alexander of Aphrodisias, at line 4 (if one agrees with Moraux and Accattino) and Aristotle of Stagira at line 5 – as suggested by these two scholars (see above, n. 50). Note, however, that Sharples does not concur with Moraux and Accattino on the identification of the ‘Aristotle’ mentioned here by Alexander with Aristotle of Mitylene.

⁵⁴ From the wide and learned bibliography on Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and the other translators of his circle, I limit myself to refer the reader in search for guidance to J. Watt, “Syriac Translators and Greek Philosophy in Early Abbasid Iraq”, *Journal of the Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 4 (2004), pp. 15-26.

⁵⁵ This results chiefly from the entry on Aristotle’s *De Anima* in the *K. al-Fibrīst* (see the note below). For further information on this entry and on Ishāq’s translation see A. Treiger, “Reconstructing Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn’s Arabic Translation of Aristotle’s *De Anima*”, *Studia graeco-arabica* 7 (2017), pp. 193-211, with reference to earlier scholarship.

⁵⁶ Later on, i.e. towards the end of the 10th century, the learned compiler of the *K. al-Fibrīst* Ibn al-Nadīm places Alexander of Aphrodisias some time after Alexander the Great, and presents him as a disciple of Galen: “Alexander of Aphrodisias. He lived during the days of the Kings of the Tribes, after Alexander [the Great]. He learned from Galen and associated with him. He nicknamed Galen ‘Mule Head’ and between them there were differences and disputations”, p. 252.24-25 Flügel = p. 313.8-9 Tajaddud; English trans. B. Dodge, *The Fibrīst of al-Nadīm. A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, Columbia U.P., New York - London 1970, vol. II, p. 608.

awkward repetition of Aristotle's name, Ishāq's solution is simple: he replaces the second occurrence with the expression "for him, *bihī*" a preposition with the personal pronoun *huwa* suffixed.⁵⁷ The result is that the verbs βουλόμενος and ἔλεγε at the beginning of our Section C are referred to the only Aristotle known to Ishāq and his readers. Thus the whole passage made up by our sections B and C amounts to an exegesis by Alexander of Aristotle's tenet, not as the account of and reply to the ἰδία ἐπίνοια of someone who might or might not be Aristotle of Mitylene, but whose personal ideas prompted in the Greek *De Intellectu* a criticism that is missing in the Arabic version.⁵⁸ Here we have, in contrast, Aristotle wanting to establish that the intellect is immortal. In this endeavor to assert the immortality of our intellectual soul, he has recourse to the "acquired" intellect. The second voice in the passage is Alexander's, who explains this doctrine.

A third name features in the passage that I am going to quote below, that of Ishāq himself. A marginal note which was included in the main text at an unknown but surely ancient time⁵⁹ informs of Ishāq's perplexity about the meaning of the sentence he was translating, and sheds light on his personal interest in the issue at hand. The Arabic text is still in need of a critical edition and the text below is only a draft. The marginal note is printed in the main text in square brackets, although its nature is clear insofar as it breaks the syntax of a sentence which, without it, flows perfectly well.⁶⁰

Alexander, *On Intellect*, Arabic version, pp. 195.3-196.8 Finnegan = pp. 39.18-40.11 Badawī
ولما أراد أن يرى¹ أن العقل لا مائت وأن يتخلص من المظائق² التي تلحقه من قوله في العقل المستفاد أعني ما يلزم في هذا القول أن يكون العقل ينزل الأماكن وليس يمكن فيه إذ كان لا جسمًا أن يكون في موضع ولا أن يتحول فيكون مرة في موضع ومرة في غيره وكان إنما قال هذا وشبهه في العقل على طريق الإشارة قال إن العقل الهولاني³ الذي³ تقال في كل جسم يقال إنه ثابت كجوهر في جوهر وأنه بالفعل أبدًا إذا كان فاعلا أفعاله. فمتى يكون من هذا الجسم إذا امتزج مزاجًا ما⁴ من جملة يصلح أن يكون آلة⁵ لهذا العقل الذي هو في هذا الخلط إذ كان موجودًا في كل جسم. وهذه الآلة هي أيضًا جسم قيل فيها أنها عقل بالقوة وهو قوة⁷ ما⁷ حادثة عن هذا الاختلاط الذي وقع للأجسام متهيئة لقبول العقل الذي بالفعل. فإذا تشبث بهذه الآلة فحينئذ يفعل كما

⁵⁷ The sentence quoted above, n. 53, is rendered as follows:

وقد فهمت عن أرسطو في العقل المستفاد أن ما وقفت به ما حركه إلى إدخال عقل مستفاد هو هذا "I understood about Aristotle on the acquired intellect that what occurred to him which moved him towards the introduction of the acquired intellect was the following" (p. 189.11-12 Finnegan = p. 36.19-20 Badawī).

⁵⁸ This is not the place to comment extensively upon Alexander's passage, but let me mention the polemical allusion to the Stoic doctrine of the total blend among bodies, a doctrine that Alexander repeatedly criticizes and which was combined with Aristotle's ideas about intellect by the philosopher who is the subject of the verbs βουλόμενος and ἔλεγε. Alexander's wording "and this too is a body" marks his disagreement and verges on incredulity: how can one think to account for Aristotle's views, if one assumes that the intellect is a sort of omnipresent body which is present in matter "as a substance in a substance"?

⁵⁹ Ancient enough to feature in the Latin translation, that was carried out towards the middle of the 12th century. Edition: G. Théry, *Autour du décret de 1210, II. Alexandre d'Aphrodise: aperçu sur l'influence de sa noétique*, Vrin, Paris 1926, pp. 74-82. For the Latin version of the note see p. 81.13-19.

⁶⁰ The Arabic version of the *De Intellectu* has been edited twice and the editors made different decisions: Finnegan kept the marginal note in the main text, but separated it from the latter by means of a typographical device; Badawī moved it to the apparatus. Not having all the manuscripts at my disposal, in the notes 1-15 above I limit myself to record the differences between the two editions and to advance two conjectures.

يفعل بالآلة الصانع ذو الآلة وعلى أنه في هبولى⁸ وبهبولى⁹ فحينئذ⁹ نقدر¹⁰ على أن نعقل¹¹ لأنَّ عقلنا¹² مُركَّبٌ من القوَّة التي هي آلة¹³ [قال إسحق إن هذا العقل، وهو العقل بالفعل الذي يُسمِّيهِ أرسطوطاليس إلهياً أو آلياً هاهنا، إن أرسطوطاليس يُسمِّيهِ العقل الذي بالقوة بعد . وأظنُّ أنه إنما أشار بذلك إلى العقل الذي فينا بالقوة، لأنه يستفاد وهو في ذاته بالفعل، فإنه يعقل وإنما يفعل فينا بالقوة التي فينا التي هي آلته الحادثة عن خلط¹³ العقل الالهي¹⁴ الذي يُسمِّيهِ أرسطو العقل الذي بالقوة ومن فعل ذلك العقل فإذا فقدنا واحداً منهما أيهما كان فليس يمكن أن نعقل¹⁵.

1 Badawī المطاعن : Finnegan المظائق 2 Finnegan يودی : Finnegan ex lat. in app. يرى 1
 3 Finnegan مزاجاً ما 4 Finnegan in textu Badawī والهبولي : Finnegan ex lat. in app. الهبولاني الذي
 5 Badawī له : Finnegan 6 Finnegan ايضاً : Finnegan 7 Badawī 8 Finnegan om. Badawī
 9 Finnegan وحينئذ : Finnegan 10 Finnegan هبولي : Finnegan Badawī 11 conieci : Finnegan في هبولي
 12 Finnegan نحن : Finnegan 13 Finnegan نقدر نحن : Finnegan 14 Finnegan نقدر نحن : Finnegan
 15 Finnegan نفعل : Finnegan in app. 13-13 Finnegan in app. ex lat. : del. Finnegan
 ut glossam om. Badawī 14 Finnegan الالهي : Finnegan 15 Finnegan نعقل : Badawī.

As he wants to show that the intellect is immortal and that it is freed from the strictures which affect it, he mentions the acquired intellect, I mean what follows in this discourse from the fact that the intellect would descend in several places, something that is impossible for it, given that it is incorporeal; hence it cannot be in a place or move or be sometimes in a place and sometimes in another; this and other similar things he says about the intellect in the way of an indication. He says that the material intellect which is said to be in every body is said to subsist as a substance in a substance, and that it is in actuality as long as it performs its actions. In so far as this body is mixed up in a good mixture which is apt to serve as an instrument to this intellect which is found in this mixture, it is extant in every body. This instrument is a body as well, and is said to be potential intellect: it is a power which comes to be from this blend which occurs in bodies to receive the active intellect. When it subsists in this instrument, then it operates as a craftsman who possesses an instrument operates through an instrument, and since it is enmattered and operates through matter, at that point we can intelligize too, because our intellect is composed out of the potentiality which is an instrument [Ishāq says: “this intellect, namely the intellect in actuality which here Aristotle labels either ‘divine’ or ‘instrumental’, later on is labelled by Aristotle ‘intellect in potentiality’]. I think that by this he indicates that intellect which is in us only in potentiality, because it is acquired, though being in itself in actuality; as a matter of fact, it intelligizes and operates in us through the power which is in us, and is its instrument arising in un from the mixture] of the divine intellect which is labelled by Aristotle ‘intellect in potentiality’, and out of the activity of that intellect. Should we be deprived of one of these two, no matter which one, it would impossible for us to intelligize.

The intellect “*mustafād*, acquired” which is presented as Aristotle’s key notion is a shortcut of the intellect “acquired from outside, *mustafād min ḥariḡin*” which in the Arabic text translates Alexander’s ἔξωθεν γινόμενος.⁶¹ Commenting upon the “acquired intellect”,

⁶¹ The separate Intellect, says Alexander, is not a part of our soul, rather it comes to be in us from outside: οὐκ ὦν μέροςον καὶ δύναμις τις τῆς ἡμετέρας ψυχῆς, ἀλλ’ ἔξωθεν γινόμενος ἐν ἡμῖν (p. 108.22 Bruns). The Arabic version, p. 186.5-6 Finnegan = p. 34.21-22 Badawī, is literal: “and it is neither a part nor a power of our soul, rather it arises in us from outside”.

the Arabic Alexander says that Aristotle is giving an “indication, *išāra*”, namely he is alluding to a doctrine to be further developed. To this end, he takes the floor to elaborate more on the nature of this intellect, as is made clear by the expression *aʿnī*, “I mean”, which has no counterpart in the Greek.

Not only what in the Greek *De Intellectu* was the critical report of an opinion turns out to be, in the Arabic version, Alexander’s exegesis of a genuine Aristotelian doctrine, but there is more. A significant shift in meaning appears, if compared with Alexander’s report. The Greek ἐν τῇ ὕλη is rendered as *al-‘aql al-hayūlānī*, “the material intellect”.⁶² While the Greek Alexander says that for the philosopher whose ideas he is discussing the intellect is present in matter, ἐν τῇ ὕλη, as an οὐσία in another οὐσία,⁶³ Ishāq seems to understand the expression τὸν νοῦν ... ἐν τῇ ὕλη as a sort of syntagm indicating the same “material intellect” which is mentioned at the beginning of the treatise.⁶⁴ Hence, it is described as something which is present in the body as a substance in a substance, thus paving the way for a new version of Alexander’s ideas about intellection.

For the Greek Alexander the intellect is a faculty which arises in us from the mixture of the bodily elements, from natural growth, and eventually through education; this power of the soul is prepared to intelligize the νοητά with the aid of the divine Intellect. In the Arabic rendition, instead, the potential intellect is indeed “a power which comes to be from this blend which occurs in bodies to receive the active intellect”, but it soon transforms into a substance whose name is *‘aql mustafād*. Both the intellectual human soul and the separate Intellect are substances. At the end of his account of Aristotle’s doctrine, the Arabic Alexander presents him as harshly criticizing the doctrine of the *aṣḥāb al-mazalla* – an unusual rendition for the “those of the Porch”⁶⁵ – for having failed to understand that the divine Intellect is *mufāriq*, separate.⁶⁶

A separate intellectual substance makes another substance, the intellect of our soul, capable of intelligizing. At variance with the divine Intellect, the substance which is our intellectual soul is not separate, rather is united with our body. To summarize, Alexander’s account of the “indication” given by Aristotle about the immortality of the intellect is that the enmattered intellect which makes use of the body is a substance which, in turn, is an instrument of the divine, separate Intellect.⁶⁷

Is this a complete misunderstanding of the *De Intellectu*? If one bears in mind the elusive nature of this piece of work and the different interpretations of contemporary scholarship, one should at least conclude that if the case, the misunderstanding was prompted by the

⁶² This is so if I am not wrong in going for *al-‘aql al-hayūlānī*, a reading which results from Finnegan’s retro-version of the Latin (see above, n. 3 of the apparatus) against *al-‘aql wa-l-hayūlā* (the reading of both editions).

⁶³ An idea, let me repeat it, that Alexander does not accept: see above, pp. 192-3.

⁶⁴ At the beginning of the *De Intellectu*, Alexander says: Νοῦς ἐστὶ κατὰ Ἀριστοτέλη τριττός, ὁ μὲν γὰρ τίς ἐστι νοῦς ὑλικός, and the corresponding Arabic version runs: العقل عند أوسطو ثلاثة أضربٍ أحدها العقل الهيلواني, p. 181.3 Finnegan = p. 31.15 Badawī.

⁶⁵ The Greek τοὺς ἀπὸ τῆς Στοιχείας (p. 113.13) translates as أصحاب المظلة (lit. “those of the sunshade”) p. 198.9-10 Finnegan = p. 41.15 Badawī, instead of the more common *aṣḥāb al-rivāq*.

⁶⁶ Alex. Aphr., *De Intell.*, p. 113.12-21 Bruns = pp. 198.8-199.9 Finnegan = pp. 41.13-42.3 Badawī.

⁶⁷ Note that in the Arabic version Alexander’s critical remark “and this is a body” (see above, n. 58) changes its meaning totally, because it refers to the human body rather than to the Intellect as it does in the Greek.

text itself. But there is much more to be said, and the crucial role of Ishāq's version in the rise of the doctrine of the "conjunction" requires that we broaden the focus to the context of his translation.

A turning point in the history of the reception of the Aristotelian epistemology in the Arab world was the fact that the *De Intellectu* was translated after Plotinus' *Enneads*. Another decisive fact was that the Arabic version of Plotinus circulated under the name of Aristotle.⁶⁸

More or less half a century before the time when Ishāq was busy translating Aristotle, a basic set of works by Plato, Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus, and Proclus had become available to the Arab readership interested in the Greek philosophical legacy. This early and, in many respects, decisive stage in the Graeco-Arabic transmission was the work of al-Kindī (d. circa 866 AD), who gathered around him at the Abbasid court a group of translators and scientists.⁶⁹ Among the translations carried out in this circle, a selection of Plotinus' *Enneads* is of special importance for the present purpose. It has been demonstrated by the late lamented Marc Geoffroy that it was here, in the Arabic Plotinus, that Ishāq found the expression "acquired intellect" which features in his translation of Alexander.⁷⁰ If we take into account the fact that the Arabic Plotinus circulated under the label of a "Theology" by "Aristotle",⁷¹ it comes as no surprise that the passages dealing

⁶⁸ For an outline of this text and its origins cf. my article "The Theology Attributed to Aristotle: Sources, Structure, Influence", in Kh. El-Rouayheb – S. Schmidtke (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, Oxford U.P., New York 2017, pp. 8-29.

⁶⁹ G. Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindī. Early Arabic Translations from the Greek and the Rise of Islamic Philosophy", in G. Endress - R. Kruk (eds.), *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, Research School CNWS, Leiden 1997, pp. 43-76.

⁷⁰ M. Geoffroy, "La tradition arabe du *Περὶ νοῦ* d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise et les origines de la théorie farabienne des quatre degrés de l'intellect", in C. D'Ancona - G. Serra (eds.), *Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodisia nella tradizione araba*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2002, pp. 156-98. Jolivet, "Étapes dans l'histoire de l'Intellect Agent", (above, n. 35) remarked that "D'un point de vue purement philologique le mot *mustafād* ne s'imposait pas. La décision de Ishāq est philosophique" (p. 167). Geoffroy's essay provides the rationale for this choice.

⁷¹ At the beginning of the pseudo-*Theology*, "Aristotle" says the following ('A. Badawī, *Aflūṭīn 'inda l-'arab. Plotinus apud Arabes. Theologia Aristotelis et fragmenta quae supersunt*, Dār al-naḥḍa al-miṣriyya, Cairo 1955, pp. 5.10-6.12 (revised after the forthcoming critical edition prepared under the aegis of the ERC project "Greek into Arabic. Philosophical Concepts and Linguistic Bridges):

وإذ قد فرغنا مما جرت العادة بتقديمه من المقدمات التي هي الأوائل الداعية إلى الإبانة عمّا نريد الإبانة عنه في كتابنا هذا، فلنترك الإطناب في هذا الفن، إذ قد أوضحناه في كتاب مطاطافوسيقى فغرضنا في هذا الكتاب القول الأول في الربوبية والإبانة عنها وأنها هي العلة الأولى، وأن الدهر والزمان تحتها، وأنها علة العلل ومبدعها بنوع من الإبداع، وأن القوة النورية تسنح منها على العقل، ومنها بتوسط العقل على النفس الكلية الفلكية، ومن العقل بتوسط النفس على الطبيعة، ومن النفس بتوسط الطبيعة على الأشياء الكائنة الفاسدة، وأن هذا العقل منها يكون بغير حركة، وأن حركة جميع الأشياء منه وبسببه، وأن الأشياء تتحرك إليه بنوع الشوق والنزوع. English trans. by G. Lewis, in Plotini *Opera* II, *Enneades* IV-V ediderunt P. Henry et H.-R. Schwyzer, Desclée de Brouwer - L'Édition Universelle, Paris-Louvain 1959, p. 487: "Now since we have completed the customary prefaces, which are principles that lead on to the explanation of what we wish to explain in this book of ours, let us not waste words over this branch of knowledge, since we have already given an account of it in the book of the *Metaphysics* (...). Now our aim in this book is the discourse on the Divine Sovereignty, and the explanation of it, and how it is the first cause, eternity and time being beneath it, and that it is the cause and the originator of causes, in a certain way, and how the luminous force steals from it over Mind and, through the medium of Mind, over the universal celestial Soul, and from Mind, through the medium of Soul, over nature, and from Soul, through the medium of nature, over the things that come to be and pass away. This action arises from it without motion: the motion of all things comes from it and is caused by it, and things move towards it by a kind of longing and desire".

with the relationship between the soul and the separate Intellect were understood as his exposition of the succinct, even enigmatic claims of *De Anima* III 5. Thus, in the subsequent generation of scholars interested in Greek science and philosophy the Arabic Aristotle - in fact, Plotinus - set the tone for the interpretation of the ποιητικόν of the *De Anima*, as well as of Alexander's *De Intellectu*.

It is time now to analyze in greater depth the details of this convoluted transmission. As we have just seen, the expression *ʿaql mustafād* was coined during the early stage of the Graeco-Arabic translations. The broader context in which it appears for the first time is the version of the passage of Plotinus' *On the Three Principal Hypostases*, V 1[10], where he claims that the soul is indeed of the same nature as the Intellect – a pivot of his interpretation of Platonism – but should not be put on equal footing as it. The soul and the Intellect are in a sense like fire and heat: they share the same nature, but one is the cause, and the other is the effect: without the intelligible level of the reality there would be no soul, exactly as without fire there is no heat. An even better comparison is that between a son and his father: they share the same nature, but one is brought to perfection by the other (something that does not happen in the case of fire and heat).

V 1[10], 3.7-20

οἷον λόγος ὁ ἐν προφορᾷ λόγου τοῦ ἐν ψυχῇ, οὕτω τοι καὶ αὐτῇ λόγος νοῦ καὶ ἡ πᾶσα ἐνέργεια καὶ ἦν προῖεται ζῶν εἰς ἄλλου ὑπόστασιν· οἷον πυρὸς τὸ μὲν ἡ συνοῦσα θερμότης, ἡ δὲ ἦν παρέχει. Δεῖ δὲ λαβεῖν ἐκεῖ οὐκ ἐκρέουσιν, ἀλλὰ μένουσιν μὲν τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ, τὴν δὲ ἄλλην ὑφισταμένην. Οὕσα οὖν ἀπὸ νοῦ νοερά ἐστι, καὶ ἐν λογιμοῦς ὁ νοῦς αὐτῆς καὶ ἡ τελείωσις ἀπ' αὐτοῦ πάλιν οἷον πατρὸς ἐκθρέψαντος, ὃν οὐ τέλειον ὡς πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐγέννησεν. Ἡ τε οὖν ὑπόστασις αὐτῆ ἀπὸ νοῦ ὁ τε ἐνεργεία λόγος νοῦ αὐτῆ ὁρωμένου. Ὅταν γὰρ ἐνίδη εἰς νοῦν, ἔνδοθεν ἔχει καὶ οἰκεῖα ἃ νοεῖ καὶ ἐνεργεῖ. Καὶ ταύτας μόνας δεῖ λέγειν ἐνεργείας ψυχῆς, ὅσα νοερῶς καὶ ὅσα οἰκοθεν· τὰ δὲ χεῖρω ἄλλοθεν καὶ πάθη ψυχῆς τῆς τοιαύτης.

Just as a thought in its utterance is an image of the thought in the soul, so soul itself is an image of the expressed thought of Intellect, and its whole activity, and the life which it sends out to establish another reality; as fire has the heat which remains with it and the heat which it gives. But one must understand that the activity on the level of Intellect does not flow out of it, but the external activity comes into existence as something distinct. Since then its existence derives from Intellect soul is intellectual, and its intellect is in discursive reasonings, and its perfection comes from Intellect, and its thought becomes actual in its seeing of Intellect. For when it looks into Intellect, it has within it and as its own what it thinks in its active actuality. And we should call these alone activities of the soul, all it does intellectually and which spring from its own home; its inferior activities come from elsewhere and belong to a soul of this inferior kind (trans. Armstrong, V, pp. 19-21).

This passage was translated into Arabic as follows:

pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*, pp. 108.17-109.15 Badawī (modified)

[...] فإنها مثال من الفعل العقل كما أن المنطق الظاهر إنما هو مثال للمنطق الباطن الذي في النفس وكذلك النفس إنما هي منطق العقل، وفعلها كله إنما هو بمعونة العقل، والحياة التي تفيضها على الأشياء إنما هي أثر من الأثر للعقل، وفعل العقل بأسره هو النفس. والعقل

والنفس إنما هو بمنزلة النار والحرارة؛ أما العقل فكالنار وأما النفس فكالحرارة المنبثّة من النار على شيء آخر، غير أنه وإن كان العقلي والنفس إنما هو بمنزلة النار والحرارة، فإن الحرارة إنما تسيل من النار سيلاناً وتسلك سلوكاً إلى أن تأتي إلى الشيء القابل لها فتكون فيه؛ وأما العقل فإنه ينبث في النفس من غير أن تسيل منه قوة من قواه. ونقول إن النفس عقلية إذا صارت من العقل غير أنها وإن كانت عقلية فإن عقلها لن يكون إلا بالفكرة والروية لأنه عقل مستفاد فمن أجل ذلك صارت تفكر وتروي لأن عقلها ناقص. والعقل هو متمم لها كالأب والابن فإن الأب هو المرئي لابنه والمتمم له. فالعقل هو الذي يتمم النفس لأنه هو الذي ولدها. ونقول إن شخص النفس إنما هو من العقل والنطق الكائن بالعقل إنما هو للعقل لا للشيء الواقع تحت البصر. وذلك إن النفس إذا رجعت إلى ذاتها ونظرت إلى العقل كان كل فعلها منسوباً إلى العقل. وينبغي أن لا نضيف فعلاً من الأفاعيل إلى النفس العقلية إلا الأفاعيل التي تفعل النفس فعلاً عقلياً وهي أفاعيلها الذاتية الممدوحة الشريفة. وأما الأفاعيل الدنية المذمومة فلا ينبغي أن تُنسب إلى النفس العقلية بل إنما تُنسب إلى النفس البهيمية لأنها آثار واقعة على هذه النفس، لا على النفس العقلية.

Just as the expressed speech is a pattern of the inner speech that is in the soul, so the soul is the speech of the mind, and all her activity is by the aid of the mind, and the life which she pours forth upon things is one of the imprints of the Intellect. The activity of mind in its entirety is soul. Mind and the soul are in the position of fire and heat. Mind is like fire and soul is like the heat that is emitted from fire upon something else. But although mind and soul are in the position of fire and heat, heat flows and proceeds from the fire until it comes to the thing which receives it, so as to be in it, whereas mind stays within the soul, without any of its powers flowing out from it. We say that the soul is intellectual, since she comes from mind, though if she is intellectual her mind will be only by thought and demonstrative reasoning, since it is **an acquired intellect**, and therefore she comes to think and reflect because her mind is defective, while mind perfects her like father and son, for the father is the rearer and perfecter of his son, and mind is that perfects soul, because it is he that begot her. We say that the individual substance of the soul is from mind, and the reason existing in actuality belongs to mind and not to anything that falls under the sight. For when soul returns to herself and looks at mind, all her activity is related to mind and we must not ascribe any of her activities to the intellectual soul except the activities which soul performs intellectually, they being her essential, praiseworthy and noble activities, whereas the base reprehensible activities must not be related to the intellectual soul but must be related to the brute soul, because they are imprints that fall on this soul and not on the intellectual soul (trans. Lewis, p. 267, modified).

That the Intellect brings to perfection the soul means, in the original passage as well as in its Arabic version, that our innate faculty of reasoning culminates in a genuinely intellectual performance only because there is a higher level of reality, that of the intelligible Forms, which elicits the soul's reasoning. The intelligible reality is the starting point of our rational knowledge and at one and the same time is its pinnacle, echoing in this respect Plato's "line of knowledge", where the *διάνοια* prepares the *νοῦς*.

It is revealing that to Plotinus' *ἐν λογιμοῦς* corresponds "by thought and demonstrative reasoning" (*bi-l-fikra wa-l-burhān*), a detail which shows the mix of Aristotelianism and

Neoplatonism typical of the “circle of al-Kindī”.⁷² Also the expression ‘*aql mustafād*’ reveals a similar mix, as it combines the Neoplatonic participation of the soul to the Intellect with the Peripatetic exegesis of the *De Anima*. One might be tempted to conclude that there was confusion and poor sensitivity to the difference between the Aristotelian and Platonic epistemologies; but one should resist the temptation. As a matter of fact, it was Plotinus who adapted to his Platonic epistemology a typical feature of the Peripatetic one: the analogy between the human faculty to intelligize and matter. Alluded to in Aristotle’s *De Anima*, the analogy was transformed by Alexander into one of the kinds of intellect, the νοῦς ὑλικός. As he often does, Plotinus endorses the idea that the soul is a sort of matter if compared to the Intellect, and adapts this analogy to his own doctrinal framework. The Intellect, whose nature is to be the perfect actuality of all the intelligible Forms, is by the same token also the origin of the principles of reasoning; the soul “receives” them and without them it would be impossible for it to reach true knowledge. Indeed, without them the soul’s knowledge would remain doxastic.

V 1[10], 3.20-23

νοῦς οὖν ἐπὶ μᾶλλον θειοτέραν ποιεῖ καὶ τῷ πατὴρ εἶναι καὶ τῷ παρεῖναι· οὐδὲν γὰρ μεταξὺ ἢ τὸ ἐτέροις εἶναι, ὡς ἐφεξῆς μέντοι καὶ ὡς τὸ δεχόμενον, τὸ δὲ ὡς εἶδος· καλὴ δὲ καὶ ἡ νοῦ ὕλη νοοειδῆς οὔσα καὶ ἀπλῆ.

Intellect therefore makes soul still more divine by being its father and by being present to it; for there is nothing between but the fact that they are different, soul as next in order and as the recipient, Intellect as the form; and even the matter of Intellect is beautiful, since it has the form of Intellect and is simple (trans. Armstrong, V, p. 21).

The Arabic version of Plotinus’ passage runs:

pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*, p. 109.16-18 Badawī (modified)

ثم نقول إن النفس شريفة بالعقل، والعقل يزيد لها شرفاً لأنه أبوها وغير مفارق لها، ولأنه لا وسط بينهما، بل النفس تتلو العقل وهي قابلة لصورته لأنه بمنزلة الهيولى. ونقول إن هيولى العقل شريفة جداً لأنها بسيطة عقلية.

Then we say that the soul is noble because of the mind and the mind increases her in honour because it is her father and does not part from her and because there is no intermediary between them; no, the soul follows the mind, receiving the form because she is in the position of intellectual matter. We say that the matter of the mind is exceedingly noble because it is simple and intellectual (trans. Lewis, p. 267).

None of the Arab readers of Aristotle’s *De Anima*⁷³ would suspect that the tenet above was not by the same author. It comes as no surprise that Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn, who was interested in Aristotle’s *De Anima* and keenly aware of its problems,⁷⁴ had in his memory these formulae

⁷² The Greek ἀπόδειξις translates as *burhān* in the Arabic version of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, *Metaphysics*, *De Anima*, and *Rhetoric*: see G. Endress - D. Gutas, *A Greek and Arabic Lexicon (GALex). Materials for a Dictionary of the Mediaeval Translations from Greek into Arabic, Fascicle 9*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2011 (Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section One: The Near and Middle East, vol. XI), pp. 212-20.

⁷³ Arist., *De An.*, III 5, 430 a 10-14.

⁷⁴ See above, n. 55.

when translating Alexander’s *De Intellectu*. The influence of “Aristotle’s” *Theology* explains how the three kinds of “intellect” listed by the Greek Alexander became four in the Arabic Alexander: the “acquired intellect” was added, as pointed out by Marc Geoffroy.⁷⁵

Now, besides the affinity between the two texts - the Arabic Plotinus which came first, and the Arabic Alexander which adopted its terminology for Alexander’s νοῦς θύραθεν - there is a significant difference between them. Alexander was explicit in claiming that the Intellect “from outside” is the divine νοῦς of the *Metaphysics*: God, the first principle of the whole universe. Plotinus was equally explicit in claiming that the divine νοῦς cannot be the first principle. In so far as it thinks itself, it is not perfectly simple, especially if one follows Alexander’s idea that the objects of its eternal thought are ἀντὰ τὰ νοητά – as Plotinus does.⁷⁶ The intelligible Forms are many, and this prevents the divine Intellect from being the ultimate origin of the whole reality, because such a principle must be perfectly simple, without any multiplicity whatsoever. Plotinus’ claim that the Intellect is indeed a divine substance, but comes second, features in the treatise *On the Three Principal Hypostases* quoted above, as well as in other parts of the *Enneads* translated into Arabic. What proved decisive for the development of the Arabic-Islamic philosophy is the fact that the typically Plotinian metaphysics of the three principles – the One, the Intellect as its first offspring, and the soul as the lowest level of the divine realm – is proclaimed by “Aristotle” to be the theological pinnacle of his own *Metaphysics*.⁷⁷

As a translator, Ishāq obviously did not alter the doctrines expounded in the *De Intellectu*: the identity between the ποιητικόν of Aristotle’s *De Anima* and the divine Intellect of the *Metaphysics* features with no modification or misunderstanding in the Arabic version.⁷⁸ At variance with Ishāq, the philosophers who endorsed the Greek legacy made a change to Alexander’s doctrine. The vast majority of them⁷⁹ sided with Alexander in the interpretation of the ποιητικόν as a separate principle external to the soul, but did not endorse its identity with God. In contrast, they adopted a metaphysical system where the First Principle was the Plotinian One,⁸⁰ and its first offspring was an Intellect highest in rank among the separate substances, which in turn were conceived of as both intellectual principles and celestial movers. The doctrine of the soul, also in its epistemological aspects, shows a similar mixture of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic features, and nowhere is this more evident than in al-Fārābī’s works.

A philosopher and Aristotelian scholar, al-Fārābī (d. 950 AD) was a reader both of the Arabic Alexander and the Arabic Plotinus. He inherited from them in his understanding of the human intellection, as clearly shown in his *Epistle on the Meanings of ‘Intellect’*.

⁷⁵ See above, n. 70.

⁷⁶ A classical essay by A.-H. Armstrong demonstrated that Plotinus takes for granted Alexander’s interpretation: “The Background of the Doctrine That the Intelligibles are not outside the Intellect”, in *Les sources de Plotin*, Fondation Hardt, Genève 1960 (Entretiens sur l’Antiquité Classique, V), pp. 391-413.

⁷⁷ See the passage quoted above, n. 71.

⁷⁸ Alex. Aphr., *De Intell.*, p. 113.2-6 Bruns = pp. 197.10-198.2 Finnegan = p. 41.4-8 Badawī.

⁷⁹ Averroes’ stance deserves an analysis which cannot be carried out here. It is, however, worth noting that even though he does not accept the Farabian-Avicennian emanation of the Intellect from the One, the Agent Intellect as a separate substance remains as a metaphysical item of his universe.

⁸⁰ Another aspect of the Arabic adaptation of the Greek ideas on the first principle is the fact that Plotinus’ One and the Aristotelian divine Intellect often merge one into the other. This topic is beyond the scope of the present article.

This treatise is reminiscent of Alexander’s *De Intellectu* as it aims to classify the meanings of this term for Aristotle;⁸¹ more specifically, it is reminiscent of Iṣḥāq’s translation as it includes in the list the *‘aql mustafād* typical of this translation. For al-Fārābī, the “acquired intellect” of the human soul results from a sort of transformation of the actual intellect of an individual human being, namely his faculty to intelligize taken in its performing an act of intellection. When the objects of intellection are the intelligible realities, they act as forms which come to be within a subject (*mawḍu‘*): at this point the acquired intellect arises as a property of the actual intellect.

al-Fārābī, *Epistle on the Meanings of ‘Intellect’*, pp. 20.1-3; 22.2-4; 23.8-24.5 Bouyges

فالعقل بالفعل متى عقل المعقولات التي هي صور له من حيث هي معقولة بالفعل صار العقل الذي كنا نقول أولاً أنه العقل بالفعل هو الآن العقل المستفاد. [...] والعقل المستفاد شبيه بموضوع لتلك ويكون العقل المستفاد للعقل الذي بالفعل [...]. فإذا ارتقى من المدة الأولى رتبة فإنما يرتقى إلى الطبيعة التي هي صور جسمانية في مواد هيولانية إلى أن يرتقى إلى تلك الذات ثم إلى ما فوق ذلك حتى إذا انتهى إلى العقل المستفاد انتهى إلى ما هو شبيه بالتخوم والحد الذي إليه تنتهي الأشياء التي تنسب إلى الهيولى والمادة منه فإنما يرتقى إلى أول رتبة الموجودات المفارقة وأول رتبة رتبة العقل الفعال.

So, once the actual intellect intellects the intelligibles that are forms for it as actual intelligibles, the intellect, which we first called the actual intellect, now becomes the acquired intellect. (...) The acquired intellect is like a subject for those [forms], and the acquired intellect belongs to the actual intellect (...). Then if one ascends by degrees from prime matter to the nature that is the corporeal form in prime matter, then up to this essence and then up to that which is above it to reach the acquired intellect, one will have reached something like the outermost boundary and limit to which the things related to prime matter and matter reach. When one ascends from [that], it is to the first level of immaterial beings, that of the Active Intellect (trans. McGinnis - Reisman, pp. 73-4, modified).⁸²

The intellectual knowledge is placed by al-Fārābī at the top of an ascending scale whose starting point is sense-perception. Once abstracted from matter, the forms of the objects perceived are ready to be grasped by our intellect when it performs its operation (*‘aql bi-l-fi‘l*). At this point, a transformation takes place. Since these forms are no longer images stored in the soul, rather they are concepts, they cease to belong to the realm of the things related to matter. As objects of intellectual knowledge, they reveal themselves to be intelligible forms. It is clear from the passage above that for al-Fārābī our soul is a sort of point of contact where the enmattered forms of the visible world and the intelligible forms which grant true

⁸¹ *Alfarabi. Risalat fi ‘l-‘aql*. Texte arabe intégral en partie inédit établi par M. Bouyges S.J., Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut 1938 (*Bibliotheca Arabica Scholasticorum*. Série arabe, VIII. 1). English trans. by J. McGinnis - D.C. Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy. An Anthology of Sources*, Hackett, Indianapolis 2007, pp. 68-78. They remark (pp. 54-5) that al-Fārābī “integrates a sophisticated theory of the intellect into this metaphysical framework, which develops the notion that the Active Intellect of Aristotle’s *De anima* III 5 is a self-subsisting substance, one that plays a role not only in human cognition, but also in generation and corruption in the sublunar realm”.

⁸² McGinnis - Reisman translate “ويكون العقل المستفاد للعقل الذي بالفعل” as “whereas it is like a form for that [potential intellect]”; also, they translate “إلى تلك الذات ثم إلى ما فوق ذلك حتى إذا انتهى إلى العقل المستفاد” as “to [the potential intellect] and above that to the acquired intellect”.

knowledge meet each other. The outcome of this contact is the “acquired intellect”. Above it there is the first level of the purely immaterial beings: the Agent Intellect. It is this separate substance - the lowest, if one proceeds from the top down - that for al-Fārābī coincides with the *ποιητικόν* of the *De Anima*. This separate substance is also the ruler of the sphere of the Moon: the tenth intelligence. It brings to actuality both the faculty of the soul, which is only a potential intellect, and the enmattered forms, which are only potentially intelligible.

al-Fārābī, *Epistle on the Meanings of 'Intellect'*, pp. 24.6-25.3 Bouyges

والعقل الفعال الذي ذكره ارسطالس في المقالة الثالثة من كتاب النفس هو صورة مفارقة لم تكن في مادة ولا تكون أصلا وهو بنوع ما هو عقل بالفعل قريب الشبه من العقل المستفاد وهو الذي جعل تلك الذات التي كانت عقلا بالقوة عقلا بالفعل وجعل المعقولات التي كانت معقولات بالقوة معقولات بالفعل.

What Aristotle calls the “Active Intellect” in Book III of *De Anima* is a separate form that has never been and never will be in matter in any way. In its species it is an actual intellect very similar to the acquired intellect. It is what makes the potential intellect an actual intellect, and it is what makes the potential intelligibles actual intelligibles (trans. McGinnis – Reisman, p. 74).

The two intellects - that which is a “separate form” and the faculty of the human soul - are more than similar to each other: for al-Fārābī, they share the same species.

al-Fārābī, *Epistle on the Meanings of 'Intellect'*, p. 27.8 Bouyges

والعقل الفعال هو من نوع العقل المستفاد.

The Active Intellect belongs to the same species as the acquired intellect (trans. McGinnis – Reisman, p. 75).

Although al-Fārābī does not say more than this, the species common to the Agent Intellect and the human intellectual soul can hardly be other than that of the immaterial substances. At this point, all is ready for a move which is destined to have long-lasting consequences in the later stages of Arabic-Islamic philosophy. It is the claim that the Agent Intellect cannot be the First Principle itself, a claim with which al-Fārābī parts company with Alexander of Aphrodisias. As we have seen before, Alexander was explicit in making the *ποιητικόν* of the *De Anima* and the divine Intellect of the *Metaphysics* one and the same principle.⁸³ Not so for al-Fārābī.

al-Fārābī, *Epistle on the Meanings of 'Intellect'*, p. 33.6-7 Bouyges

فمن ذلك يتبين أنه ليس فيه كفاية في أن يكون هو المبدأ الأول لجميع الموجودات إذ كان يفتقر إلى أن يعطى مادة.

It is clear from this that [the Active Intellect] is not sufficient itself to be the First Principle of all existents, since it needs to be given some matter on which to act (trans. McGinnis – Reisman, p. 77).

⁸³ Above, pp. 195-6.

While the Agent Intellect operates on a potentiality, the First Principle needs no substrate whatsoever to perform its universal action. Hence, if the Agent Intellect operates on a potential intellect, this entails the consequence that it is not the First Principle, as al-Fārābī suggests by contrasting “the First Principle of all existents” with the Agent Intellect. The separate substance described in Aristotle’s *De Anima* as the cause of our intellection cannot be the Unmoved Mover of the *Metaphysics*: the latter is the cause of the whole universe, whereas the former actualizes the potentiality to intelligize, hence it is the cause of a specific perfection.

The hidden assumption of al-Fārābī’s statement is a typically Neoplatonic notion of causality which circulates in the Graeco-Arabic philosophical literature from the early stage of the translations of the circle of al-Kindī. That only the First Cause operates with no substrate whatsoever, while every other principle needs something to act upon, is a pivot of what we call the *Liber de Causis*, but which the Arabic readership knew as the *Book of Aristotle’s Exposition of the Pure Good*.⁸⁴ This well-known adaptation of selected materials from Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* shares with the pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle* the idea that the separate Intellect is different from and second to the First Principle. Even without embarking upon the question of the sources of al-Fārābī,⁸⁵ one can confidently say that he took inspiration not only from Alexander’s *De Intellectu*, but also from these two Neoplatonic works.

It is from in the Arabic adaptations of Plotinus and Proclus which had been created in the first half of the 9th century that al-Fārābī got the idea that for Aristotle the First Cause and the Agent Intellect did not coincide - as had been maintained by Alexander. The attribution of both the pseudo-*Theology* and the *Liber de Causis* to Aristotle is also the reason whereby Alexander, whose *De Intellectu* was translated after Plotinus’ and Proclus’ works, ended up siding with “Aristotle’s” tenet that the soul is a sort of noble, spiritual matter to be informed by the Intellect.⁸⁶

Thus, the topic of the “acquired intellect” appears to be intrinsically connected with the doctrine of the *wāhib al-ṣuwar* (*dator formarum*), the intellectual substance whose cosmological role is to provide the sublunar world with the forms. The lowest in the hierarchy of the celestial movers, it also “imprints on the soul the intelligible forms”, to adopt Avicenna’s formula for an idea which traces back to al-Fārābī.⁸⁷ With this theory

⁸⁴ *Liber de Causis*, propositions 3 and 17. Cf. ‘A. Badawī, *al-Aflātūniyya al-muḥḍata ‘inda l-‘arab. Ubrūqlus, al-ḥayr al-maḥḍ; fī qidam al-‘ālam; fī masā’il al-ṭibbiyya. Hirmis, Mu’adalat al-naḥs. Aflātūn, al-rawābī*, (ḥaḡḡaḡahā wa-qaddama lahā) Maktabat al-naḥḡa al-miṣriyya, al-Qāhira 1955 (Dirāsāt islāmiyya, 19), pp. 5.9-6.6 Badawī (prop. 3) and pp. 19.1-12 (prop. 17).

⁸⁵ D. Janos, *Method, Structure, and Development in al-Fārābī’s Cosmology*, Brill, Leiden 2012 (Islamic Philosophy and Theology. Texts and Studies, 85); J. Jabbour, *De la matière à l’intellect. L’âme et la substance de l’homme dans l’œuvre d’al-Fārābī*, Vrin, Paris 2021 (Études Musulmanes, 53).

⁸⁶ Compare the passage of the pseudo-*Theology* quoted above, pp. 199-200, with the following passage of the *Liber de Causis*, prop. 3, p. 5.14-16 Badawī (modified):

وذلك أن العلة الأولى أبدعت أنية النفس بتوسط العقل، ولذلك صارت النفس تفعل فعلا إلهيا. فلما أبدعت العلة الأولى أنية النفس صيرتها كسباط العقل يفعل العقل فيها أفاعيله، فلذلك صارت النفس العقلية تفعل فعلا عقليا. “Thus, after the first cause created the being of soul, it placed it as something subject to an intelligence on which it carries out its activities. Because of this, then, an intellectual soul carries out an intellectual activity”. English trans. by Taylor in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, translated by V. A. Guagliardo O.P.–Ch.R. Hess O.P. – R.C. Taylor, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 1996, p. 19.

⁸⁷ For more information on this point cf. my article “Aux origines du *dator formarum*. Plotin, *l’Épître sur la*

al-Fārābī created a model for Avicenna and, chiefly through him, for centuries to come in Arabic-Islamic philosophy.⁸⁸ The “conjunction” of the highest faculty of the rational soul with the lowest separate intelligence was destined to become one of the most typical features of Arabic-Islamic philosophy in the mature Latin Middle Ages.

5. Intellectus adeptus

If the separation from and subordination to God of the Agent Intellect is typical of the Arabic reception of Aristotle's elusive claims in Book III of the *De Anima*,⁸⁹ the Latin reception of the *Dator formarum* is characterized by the fact that the Agent Intellect returns to be identified with God. The Arabic tenth intelligence is abandoned, and the Agent Intellect is seen as another name for Augustine's *magister interior*. In the *De Anima* of Dominicus Gundisalvi, the translator of Avicenna's *De Anima* into Latin,⁹⁰ the action of the Agent Intellect on the soul and the Augustinian illumination merge together.⁹¹ The adaptations of

science divine et al-Fārābī”, in E. Coda – C. Martini Bonadeo (eds.), *De l'Antiquité tardive au Moyen Age. Études de logique aristotélicienne et de philosophie grecque, syriaque, arabe et latine offertes à Henri Hugonnard-Roche*, Vrin, Paris 2014 (Études Musulmanes, 44), pp. 381-414. For a different account, cf. D.N. Hasse, “Avicenna's ‘Giver of Forms’ in Latin Philosophy, especially in the Works of Albertus Magnus”, in D.N. Hasse - A. Bertolacci (eds.), *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2012 (Scientia Graeco-Arabica, 7), pp. 225-50. On the reception of this topic in the Muslim West see D. Wirmer, *Vom Denken der Natur zur Natur des Denkens. Ibn Bāğğas Theorie der Potenz als Grundlegung der Psychologie*, De Gruyter, Berlin - München - Boston 2014 (Scientia Graeco-Arabica, 13), pp. 225-50.

⁸⁸ Avicenna writes: “We say that the theoretical faculty (*al-quwwa al-nazariyya*) in man also comes into actuality from potentiality, through the illumination of a substance whose nature is to produce light. This is because a thing does not come into actuality from potentiality by itself but through something else which gives it actuality. The actuality which this substance gives to the potential human intellect is the intelligible forms. There exist then something which from its own substance confers and imprints on the soul the intelligible forms. This entity thus has in its essence (*indahu*) the intelligible forms (*šuwār al-ma'qūlāt*) and is therefore essentially an intellect. (...) This something is in itself a sufficient cause to bring the other intellects from potentiality into actuality; it is termed, in relation to the potential intellects which pass into actuality, active intellect”, trans. by F. Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology. An English translation of Kitāb al-Nağāt*, Book II, Chapter VI with historico-philosophical notes and textual improvements of the Cairo Edition, Oxford U.P., London 1952, pp. 68-9; Arabic text, Ibn Sīnā, *al-Nağāt min al-ğarq fi baħr al-dalālāt*, ed. M.T. Dānešpazūh, Dānešgah Tehran, Tehran 1985, pp. ۳۹۴. ۹–۳۹۵. ۶. Cf. also Avicenna's *De Anima (Arabic Text); being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Šifā'*, ed. by F. Rahman, Oxford U.P., London - New York - Toronto 1959, pp. 234.14-238.18. For a commentary on Avicenna's doctrine of the four kinds of intellect and its Latin reception by Dominic Gundisalvi cf. D.N. Hasse, “Das Lehrstück von den vier Intellekten in der Scholastik: von den arabischen Quellen bis zu Albertus Magnus”, *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 66 (1999), pp. 21-77.

⁸⁹ R. Walzer, “Aristotle's Active Intellect (νοῦς ποιητικός) in Greek and Early Islamic Philosophy”, in *Plotino e il neoplatonismo in Oriente e in Occidente*, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Roma 1974, pp. 423-36, considers that “the Active Intellect as a minor cosmic transcendent principle” is a distinctive feature of al-Fārābī's reception of the Greek legacy (p. 433). See also Jolivet, “Étapes dans l'histoire de l'Intellect Agent” (above, n. 35).

⁹⁰ *Avicenna Latinus, Liber de Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus*, IV-V. Édition critique par S. Van Riet. Introduction par G. Verbeke, Peeters - Brill, Louvain - Leiden 1968; *Avicenna Latinus, Liber de Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus*, I-II-III. Édition critique par S. Van Riet. Introduction par G. Verbeke, Peeters-Brill, Louvain-Leiden 1972.

⁹¹ This point was remarked first by É. Gilson, “Les sources gréco-arabes de l'augustinisme avicennisant”, *suivi de L. Massignon*, “Notes sur le texte original arabe du *De Intellectu* d'al-Farabi”, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 4 (1929-30), pp. 5-149 and pp. 150-58 (L. Massignon), reprinted as a volume, Vrin, Paris 1986 (same pagination). For an outline of the Latin reception of the *Dator formarum* and the *intellectus adeptus*

and reactions to the *Dator formarum* in the Latin world cannot be dealt with here as they deserve, and one may surely side with the scholars who remark that the cosmological role of this principle, once abandoned by Averroes,⁹² did not survive in the new context.⁹³ However, neither Averroes nor the Latin readers of the Arab Peripatetics discarded the epistemological role of the Agent Intellect, now identified with the *Dator formarum* of the Farabian and Avicennian tradition.⁹⁴

It is well known that in the 13th century the nature of the Agent Intellect was part and parcel of the harshly debated question of the individuality vs universality of the human power to intelligize. This topic is beyond the scope of the present article; thus, I will limit myself to say that when the Agent Intellect was not identified with a part or a power of the human soul itself,⁹⁵ it was conceived of as another name for God, the source of light and truth for the soul in Augustinian vein. The illumination of the soul was no longer the task of the Arabic tenth intelligence.⁹⁶ One may then conclude that the adaptation of Alexander’s *De Intellectu* and the Farabian ideas outlined above in Section 4 remained typical only of Arabic-Islamic thought. But the ‘*aql mustafād*’ was not completely discontinued. A Latin posterity was granted to this Graeco-Arabic new entry by the translation into Latin of al-Fārābī’s *Epistle on the Meanings of ‘Intellect’*,⁹⁷ by that of Avicenna’s *De Anima*,⁹⁸ and that of Averroes’ *Long Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*.⁹⁹ I will discuss here, as a conclusion, only one example of this posterity, to support the claim that with this doctrine the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic epistemologies intermingled also in the Latin world.

see A. De Libera, *Albert le Grand et la philosophie*, Vrin, Paris 1990, pp. 251-66. See also Hasse, “Avicenna’s ‘Giver of Forms’ in Latin Philosophy” (above, n. 87), pp. 233-5 (on William of Auvergne) and N. Polloni, *The Twelfth-Century Renewal of Latin Metaphysics. Gundissalinus’s Ontology of Matter and Form*, Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies Durham University - Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 2020 (Durham Medieval and Renaissance Monographs and Essays, 6), here p. 46.

⁹² H.A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect. Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect*, Oxford U.P., New York - Oxford 1992, pp. 220-57.

⁹³ Hasse, “Avicenna’s ‘Giver of Forms’ in Latin Philosophy” (above, n. 87).

⁹⁴ As Davidson has it, “Although he repeatedly revised his position on the active intellect’s role as a cause of sublunar existence, Averroes remained firm throughout his career regarding the active’s intellect nature. Like his predecessors among the Arabic Aristotelians, he consistently construed it as an incorporeal substance transcending the human soul; and he took for granted that it is the last link - or, in his *Long Commentary* on the *De Anima*, which raises the material intellect to the status of the last of the eternal incorporeal substances, the penultimate link - in the hierarchy of incorporeal intelligences” (p. 315).

⁹⁵ The favorite, yet not unique interpretation of Thomas Aquinas: see the note below.

⁹⁶ I have tried to show that Thomas himself, who was the main proponent of the agent intellect as a power of the human soul, was not alien to posit also a separate source of intellection for the human soul: “Elementi di neoplatonismo nella teoria della conoscenza di Tommaso d’Aquino (*Q.d. De Veritate*, 10, 6 e *Super librum de causis*, prop. 13[14])”, in A. Bertolacci – A. Paravicini Bagliani (eds.), *La filosofia medievale tra antichità ed età moderna. Saggi in memoria di Francesco Del Punta (1941-2013)*, SISMEL – Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2016, pp. 325-62.

⁹⁷ Above, n. 81.

⁹⁸ Above, n. 90.

⁹⁹ Averrois Cordubensis *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De Anima libros* recensuit F.S. Crawford, Cambridge [MA] 1953 (Corpus Commentariorum Auerrois in Aristotelem ... Versionum Latinarum VI 1); English trans.: *Averroes (Ibn Rushd) of Cordoba. Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, Translated with Introduction and Notes by R.C. Taylor with Th.-A. Druart, subeditor, Yale U.P., New Haven - London 2009 (Yale Library of Medieval Philosophy).

In the epoch-making year 1270 which saw a climactic moment of the conflict between the Faculty of Arts and the Paris church, the Dominican friar Giles of Lessines sent to Albert the Great, who was in Cologne, a letter asking for advice on fifteen questions.¹⁰⁰ The first of these was about intellect. Giles of Lessines informed Albert that the *magistri Parisienses* taught (*proponunt in scholis*) that a unique intellect is shared by the whole mankind (*quod intellectus omnium hominum est unus et idem numero*). Albert’s discussion of the doctrine of the potential intellect as a separate substance common to all the individuals of the species ‘man’ includes a survey of the position of Aristotle and his school. According to Albert, the Aristotelians (*Peripatetici*) held about the intellect a doctrine which was common to all of them, which he labels *antiqua positio*. Later, two interpretations took the floor, in opposition to one another.¹⁰¹ A discussion follows which culminates in the claim that the *antiqua positio* – recorded, according to Albert, by al-Fārābī – entails that the faculty to intelligize is the species of all the intelligible contents, and by no means a passive potentiality waiting for them.¹⁰² This said, Albert disposes quickly of the doctrine taught in Paris which caused Giles of Lessines’ dismay. This theory does not meet with his approval: if one understands philosophy, says Albert, one cannot side with the idea of the potential intellect as something existing independently of and, so to speak, above all human beings who allegedly have recourse to it.¹⁰³ The *nova positio* held by Greek and Arab Peripatetics seems to be more promising:

Albert, *De XV Probl.*, pp. 32.62-33.57 Geyer

Post hos Graeci sapientes, Porphyrius scilicet et Eustratius, Aspasius et Michael Ephesius et quam plures alii venerunt praeter Alexandrum, qui Epicuro consentit, qui omnes intellectum hominis intellectum possessum et non de natura intelligentiae existentem esse dixerunt.

¹⁰⁰ Alberti Magni (...) *De Unitate Intellectus* edidit A. Hufnagel, *De XV Problematibus* ed. B. Geyer, *Problematata determinata* ed. I. Weisheipl, *De Fato* ed. P. Simon, Aschendorff, Münster 1975 (Opera Omnia XVII pars 1). German translation: Albert der Grosse, *Über der fünfzehn Streitfragen* übersetzt von H. Anzulewicz, eingeleitet und kommentiert von N. Wilker, Herder, Freiburg i.B. 2010; Italian translation: Alberto Magno, *Quindici problemi*, Introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di A. Rodolfi, ETS, Pisa 2018. See also H. Anzulewicz, “Entwicklung und Stellung der Intellekttheorie im System des Albertus Magnus”, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 70 (2003), pp. 165-218.

¹⁰¹ Albert, *De XV Probl.*, p. 31.50-53 Geyer: “In philosophia igitur Peripateticorum non nisi duas novas positiones invenimus a se valde differentes et unam antiquam in qua non differunt Peripatetici, sed omnes uniformiter conveniunt”. The “ancient position” is Anaxagoras’, who held that the human faculty to intelligize – the *intellectus possibilis* – is separate, pure, and free from any determination which might impede the incoming of data from outside. On the basis of this assumption, says Albert, some wrongly thought that the potential intellect could not be individual, since individuality entails determination (p. 34.37-52 Geyer). The two *novae positiones* are respectively (i) that of the Greek *sapientes* and the Arabic *philosophi*, on which more later, and (ii) that of Avicbron (Ibn Gabirol, d. circa 1085). Although Albert’s own position is different from (i), and although (ii) is judged not genuinely Peripatetic, Albert’s main point is to establish that none of the Peripatetic accounts of intellection, be they ancient or new, elicit the interpretation of the *magistri parisienses* who alarmed Gilles of Lessines. I owe this illuminating analysis of Albert’s argumentation to Silvia Donati, who has been so kind to share with me her interpretation of Albert’s passages discussed in this article (see also below, n. 108, n. 111, and 113).

¹⁰² Albert, *De XV Probl.*, p. 32.55-59 Geyer: “Hoc igitur omnium Peripateticorum antiqua est positio secundum quod eam Alfarabius determinavit. Ex qua sequitur intellectum possibilem intelligibilem omnium esse speciem et non omnino esse materialem ad ipsa”.

¹⁰³ Albert, *De XV Probl.*, p. 33.55-61 Geyer: “Et quia ad philosophos loquimur, qui talibus perfecte debent esse instructi, his amplius non insistimus”.

Et quem Graeci sapientes possessum, eundem Arabum philosophi Avicenna, Averroes, Abubacher et quidam alii adeptum esse dicebant, quia id quod possessum est, aliud est et alterius naturae a possidente. Dicunt enim, quod cum anima intellectualis hominis sit imago totius orbis et sola omnis orbis capax et forma organico corpori deputata per naturae convenientiam, necessarium est ipsam esse imaginem intelligentiae illius quae est decimi orbis. (...) Hac tali positione facta, sequitur quod sicut se habet intelligentia decimi orbis ad intelligentiam orbium superiorum, ita se habet anima intellectualis quae est in homine ad intellectus orbium superiorum. Et ideo, sicut <in> intelligentia decimi orbis possessae et adeptae sunt formaliter intelligentiae superiorum, eo quod informant ipsam ad operationem intellectualem, ita in anima sunt lumina intelligentiarum adepta et possessa ab illustratione intelligibilem, et sicut intelligentia ultimi ordinis se habet ad potentias elementorum, sic se habet anima ad distinctiones et operationes organorum. (...) Ex his de necessitate sequitur intellectum hominis a tali natura animae quae organica est esse possessum et adeptum a natura superiori.

After these <ancient Peripatetics> came some Greek scholars: Porphyry, Eustratius, Aspasius, and Michael of Ephesus, and several others all of whom - with the exception of Alexander of Aphrodisias who sides with Epicurus - maintained that the intellect of man is a possessed intellect, by no means something which shares the nature of the separate intelligence. By the way, the same entity which the Greek scholars labelled ‘possessed’ was said to be ‘acquired’ by the philosophers of the Arabs: Avicenna, Averroes, Abu Bakr¹⁰⁴ and some others, because what is possessed is different in nature from that which possesses it. They say, in fact, that since man’s rational soul is the image of the whole universe and is the only one to be capable of understanding the universe albeit being a form charged with the care of an organic body for the good order of nature, by necessity it is the image of the intelligence of the tenth sphere. (...) Once such a position is established, the consequence is that the intelligence of the tenth sphere stands with respect to the intellects of the higher spheres as the intellectual soul stands with respect to the intelligence of the superior spheres. Hence, as in the intelligence of the tenth sphere the higher intelligences are possessed and acquired in the manner of form, as they inform it, making it apt to perform the intellectual operation, so in the human soul the lights of the intelligences are acquired and possessed thanks to the illumination of the intelligibles; furthermore, the intelligence of the lowest order stands with respect to the elemental powers as the soul stands with respect to the differences and the operations of the bodily organs. (...) It follows by necessity from these premises that the human intellect is possessed and acquired from a higher nature by that soul which has to do with the bodily organs.

This passage has been commented upon from a number of perspectives. It shows to what extent Albert is conversant with the Byzantine commentaries, known to him through Robert Grosseteste’s translation of the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* by

¹⁰⁴ Albert’s source is Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De Anima*, p. 397.299-311 Crawford. As the latter remarks in his introduction, p. XV, the translator into Latin Michael Scot uses here the form “Abubacher” for Ibn Bāḡḡa (whose complete name is Abū Bakr ibn Bāḡḡa). Usually the Latin “Abubacher” stands for Abū Bakr ibn Ṭufayl, while the usual rendition of Ibn Bāḡḡa’s name is “Avempace”. On the consequences of this double naming of the same philosopher in the Latin tradition see A. De Libera, *Averroès. L’intelligence et la pensée. Sur le De Anima*, Flammarion, Paris 1998, p. 207 n. 142.

Eustratius of Nicaea – a work which provides him with information on an entire tradition of Aristotelianisms.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the impact on Albert's philosophy of the theory of the "conjunction" between our intellect and the separate substances has been discussed.¹⁰⁶ Finally, the part which I omitted in the citation above contains a famous Albertine saying which has been commented upon time and again: *opus naturae est opus intelligentiae*.¹⁰⁷

For the present purpose, let's focus on the account of the intellectual part of the human soul provided by this *nova positio*. It is shared by Greek and Arabic Peripatetics, who held that the human soul comes into possession of the intellect, thus implying that the two – our soul and the intellect – are different from one another. This idea, says Albert, is expressed more clearly in the Arabic version than in the Greek one, because the Arab Peripatetics call this intellect "acquired", and what is acquired is, by definition, different from that which acquires it – a difference which is less clear if one uses the term *possessus*, as the Greek Peripatetics do. Not only. While the latter limit themselves to stating that the intellect which comes into possession of the human soul does not coincide with the separate substance (*intelligentia*, in Albert's terminology),¹⁰⁸ the Arab Peripatetics elaborate more on this point. Indeed, they proceed to establish a comparison between the separate intelligences and

¹⁰⁵ M. Trizio, "Qui fere in hoc sensu exponunt Aristotelem. Note on the Byzantine Sources of the Albertine Notion of *intellectus possessus*", in L. Honnefelder - H. Möhle, S. Bullido del Barrio (eds.), *Via Alberti. Texte, Quellen, Interpretationen*, Aschendorff, Münster 2009 (Subsidia Albertina, 2), pp. 79-101.

¹⁰⁶ A. De Libera, *Albert le Grand et la mystique allemande*, in M.J.F.M. Hoenen – J.H.J. Schneider – G. Wieland (eds.), *Philosophy and Learning. Universities in the Middle Ages*, Brill, Leiden 1995 (Education and Society in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, 6) pp. 29-42; L. Sturlese, "Intelletto acquisito e divino. La dottrina filosofica di Alberto il Grande sulla perfezione della ragione umana", *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 23 (2003), pp. 161-89; Id., "Vernunft und Glück. Die Lehre vom *intellectus adeptus* und die mentale Glückseligkeit bei Albert dem Großen", *Lectio Albertina VIII*, Aschendorff, Münster 2005; Id., "*Intellectus adeptus*. L'intelletto e i suoi limiti secondo Alberto il Grande e la sua scuola", in M.C. Pacheco - J.F. Meirinhos (eds.), *Intellect et imagination dans la philosophie médiévale. Intellect and Imagination in Medieval Philosophy*. Actes du XI^{ème} Congrès international de philosophie médiévale, Porto 26-30 août 2002, Brepols, Turnhout 2006, vol. I, pp. 305-21.

¹⁰⁷ J.A. Weisheipl, "The Axiom *Opus naturae est opus intelligentiae* and its Origin", in A. Zimmermann - G. Mayer (eds.), *Albertus Magnus Doctor Universalis 1280-1980*, Grünewald, Mainz 1980, pp. 441-63; L. Hödl, "*Opus naturae est opus intelligentiae*. Ein neuplatonisches Axiom im aristotelischen Verständnis des Albertus Magnus", in F. Niewöhner - L. Sturlese (eds.), *Averroismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, Spur, Zurich 1994, pp. 132-48.

¹⁰⁸ J. Jolivet, "Intellect et intelligence. Note sur la tradition arabo-latine des XII^e-XIII^e siècles", in S.H. Nasr (ed.), *Mélanges offerts à Henri Corbin*, Tehran 1977, pp. 681-702 (reprinted in Id., *Philosophie médiévale arabe et latine*, Vrin, Paris 1995, pp. 169-80), remarks that "(...) le couple intelligence/intellect met une dualité là où les vocabulaires grec et arabe n'avaient chacun qu'un seul terme. (...) le cas d'Averroès est confus. Il n'en est pas de même de l'Ibn Sinā latin – Avicenne. (...) Le *De Anima* dans sa forme médiévale, accessible dans l'excellente édition qu'en a donnée S. Van Riet, nous fournit tout ce que nous pouvons souhaiter. Cette traduction, qui date d'après 1150 et est l'œuvre commune de Dominic Gundissalinus et d'Ibn Dawūd, utilise les mots 'intelligence' et 'intellect' d'une façon parfaitement régulière et précise. Le premier désigne toujours l'agent de la connaissance intellectuelle, comme dans les *Questions anonymes* sur le *Traité de l'âme*; c'est, disait Gilles de Rome, la dixième intelligence, que lui-même, comme bien d'autres, nomme intellect agent et qu'ici s'appelle quelquefois intelligence tout court, mais le plus souvent intelligence agente (*intelligentia agens*). Quant au mot 'intellect', la traduction latine l'emploie quand il est question de ce qui est intellectuel dans l'âme humaine" (quoted after the reprint, pp. 173 and 175). Although Albert does not endorse the theory of the tenth Intelligence as the cause for the soul to possess the intelligible forms, in the passage quoted above he clearly states that the soul owes the illumination of the intelligibles to the light of the separate intellectual substances.

the human soul. The tenth Intelligence, they maintain, acquires the intelligible forms from the separate substances above it and also rules what is below it, namely the elemental powers of the sublunar world. Similarly, the human soul acquires the intelligible forms from the separate substances above it, and also rules the bodily organs. Such is their theory, and even though Albert does not explicitly side with it, he does not condemn it either, as he did, in contrast, with that of the *magistri Parisienses*, who misunderstood the status of the intellect, turning it into a unique power shared by mankind as a whole. That the *intellectus adeptus* is individual necessarily follows from the fact that it comes into possession of the individual soul of an individual human being.¹⁰⁹

Interesting as it may be, this point cannot retain us here. It is more germane to the present question Albert’s understanding of the relationship between the theory of these commentators and Aristotle’s doctrine. In his *De Anima* Albert makes use of the same set of ancient authors in a section entitled *digressio* on “the cause and the mode of the conjunction of the Agent Intellect with us”.¹¹⁰ After having declared siding with Averroes and in part also with Ibn Bāḡḡa and al-Fārābī on the issue of the *causa coniunctionis*, Albert claims that the intelligible contents (*intellecta speculata*) rise in us in two ways: *per naturam*, and this is the case with the axioms (*dignitates demonstrationis primae*) and *per voluntantem*, as the outcome of study, enquiry, and teaching. Now, all these depend ultimately on the Agent Intellect, which infuses intelligibility in them. How does this happen? It happens because the Agent Intellect makes the intelligible objects actually intellectured by our mind (*faciendo haec intellecta secundum actum esse intellecta*). In this way, the Agent Intellect operates in us as an efficient cause.¹¹¹

Albert, *De Anima*, pp. 221.87-222.14 Stroick

Et quia omnibus his influit intellectualitatem et denudationem, sunt omnia sibi similia in hoc quod separata sunt et nuda; et ideo in omnibus his accipit continue intellectus possibilis lumen agentis et efficitur sibi similior et similior de die in diem. Et hoc vocatur a philosophis moveri ad continuitatem et coniunctionem cum agente intellectu; et cum sic acceperit omnia intelligibilia, habet lumen agentis ut formam sibi adhaerentem, et cum ipse sit lumen suum, eo quod lumen suum est essentia sua et non est extra ipsum, tunc adhaeret intellectus agens possibili sicut forma materiae. Et hoc sic compositum vocatur a Peripateticis *intellectus adeptus* et divinus; et tunc homo perfectus est ad operandum opus illud quod est opus suum, in quantum est homo, et hoc est opus, quod operatur deus, et hoc est perfecte per seipsum contemplari et intelligere separata. Et iste modus et ista coniunctionis causa concordat cum Aristotele in X Ethicae, ubi fere dicit ista, et praecipue concordat Eustratio et Michaeli Ephesio, qui fere in hoc sensu exponunt Aristotelem ibidem.

¹⁰⁹ Albert, *De XV Probl.*, p. 33.70-80 Geyer: “Ex his autem facile convincitur, quod cum illud quod est imago intelligentiae ex ea parte qua comparatur ad qualitates elementales, nec unius naturae sit nec unius potentiae nec unius puritatis, quod anima unius non est anima alterius, igitur possidens in uno non idem quod possidens in alio. Si autem hoc concedere necessarium est, cum secundum possidentia et adipiscentia secundum esse differant possessa et adepta, sequitur necessario, quod intellectus possessi et adepti secundum esse singulariter differant in quolibet”.

¹¹⁰ Alberti Magni (...) *De Anima* ed. C. Stroick, Aschendorff, Münster 1968, III 3, 11 (“Et est digressio declarans veram causam et modum coniunctionis intellectus agentis nobiscum”).

¹¹¹ Albert, *De Anima*, p. 221.70-86 Stroick. I am grateful to Silvia Donati for pointing out that elsewhere (*De Intell. et intell.* II, c. 5, 8, 9; *Metaph.* XI, tr. 1 c. 9; *De Unitate intellectus*) Albert maintains that when our intellectual faculty increases in its capability to intelligize, it becomes apt to grasp the light of the separate intelligences. This is the status indicated by the expression *intellectus adeptus*.

Since it infuses intellectuality and immateriality in all these items, they all resemble it as they are separate and immaterial: for this reason the potential intellect receives uninterruptedly the light of the Agent Intellect in all these items and becomes day to day more similar to it. For the philosophers this means proceeding towards contact and conjunction with the Agent Intellect; since this is the way in which the potential intellect reaches all intelligible forms, it has the light of the Agent Intellect as an inherent form; and since this latter is its light, and its light, far from being outside it, coincides with its essence, it follows that the Agent Intellect is inherent in the potential intellect as the form does in matter. The entity which results from such a composition by the Peripatetics is called “acquired” and “divine” intellect: at this point the human being has reached the perfection that enables him to perform his action, that which pertains to him as a human being; this is the same action performed by God, namely to contemplate perfectly through himself and to intelligize the separate beings. This mode and this cause of the conjunction are in agreement with Aristotle, who says almost the same in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*,¹¹² and even more in agreement with Eustratius and Michael of Ephesus, who explain Aristotle almost in the same way when commenting upon *EN* 10.

Albert was keenly aware of the fact that the doctrine of the *intellectus adeptus*, namely the idea that the conjunction with the separate substances allows the human soul to imitate the divine self-intellection, was to a large extent a later reworking of Aristotle’s statements about the soul and its intellectual power.¹¹³ Still, for him such a reworking – both in its Greek and Arabic versions – was not alien from Aristotle’s genuine way of thinking. The tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, with its claim that the theoretical activity of the human soul is somehow divine, counted as proof that these Peripatetics did not go astray. Albert ignored their Neoplatonic allegiance; nevertheless, he did not fail to remark the affinity of this position with “Plato’s”.¹¹⁴

The Neoplatonic doctrine of participation entered Alexander’s *De Intellectu* when Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn adopted the *‘aql mustafād* of the pseudo-*Theology*. Since then, this expression has not ceased to convey a typical mix of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic elements in the epistemologies of the Arab philosophers. Their general account of the way in which the human beings reach knowledge is shaped by this mix, and even more by al-Fārābī’s decisive move to keep apart the highest separate substance – God – and another separate substance, lower in grade, which provides the human soul with the intelligible forms: the Tenth Intelligence.

¹¹² Arist., *Eth. Nic.*, X 7, 1177 b 5 - 1170 a 9.

¹¹³ In *De Anima* III 3, 11.21-31 Albert is explicit in claiming that Aristotle’s *De Anima* III 5 means that the agent intellect is *pars et potentia animae*. For him, Averroes parts company with Aristotle on this issue, even though Albert’s phrasing quite strangely implies that it is Aristotle who parts company with Averroes: “Nos autem in dictis istis nihil mutamus, nisi hoc quod etiam Aristoteles mutasse videtur, quando dixit quod ‘sicut in omni natura’ in qua est patiens, etiam est agens, et ita oportet esse ‘etiam in anima has differentias’. Per hoc enim videtur nobis, nec de hoc dubitamus, quin intellectus agens sit pars et potentia animae, sed tunc dicentes eum esse partem, erit quidem animae semper coniunctus sicut pars, sed lumen eius, quo operatur intellecta, hoc non semper est actu coniunctum intellectui possibili, qui est etiam separatus, ut dictum est supra”. In this passage I follow Silvia Donati’s suggestion to read at l. 21-22 *mutamus* and *mutasse* (with manuscript C) instead of *imitamur* and *imitasse* (with Stroick).

¹¹⁴ Albert, *De XV Probl.*, p. 33.65-69 Geyer: “In hac autem adeptione nobilissima omnes Peripatetici radicem dixerunt esse immortalitatis et per ipsam homines in deos transponi et transformari, et tales Platonis philosophia heroas quasi semideos appellat”.

This specific trait of the Arabic-Islamic theories of intellection was not accepted in the Latin Middle Ages. Here, however, the intermingling of the Aristotelian and Platonic-Neoplatonic doctrines of knowledge was similar to that which characterizes the Arab reception of Alexander’s *On Intellect*, and the Farabian-Avicennian theory of intellection. Also in the Latin Middle Ages, especially after the spread of Aristotle’s *De Anima* and *De Sensu et sensato*, our knowledge starts from sense perception and our concepts are abstractions; nothing is in the intellect without having been grasped by sense perception. However, many philosophers and theologians did not hesitate to claim that the pinnacle of the human cognitive faculty consists in an intellectual vision of the intelligible truths and – with qualification – even of God. Bonaventure’s continuous line ascending from sense perception to the *apex mentis* is an example of such intermingling of philosophical traditions: its remote beginning was the Christian adaptation of the Stoic-Platonic *Logos*, but this theory reached its consolidated form in late Antiquity, with the Neoplatonic doctrine of the *παρουσία* of the transcendent One to the soul. A similar mix appears also in Albert the Great, but now the *apex mentis* has another name: *intellectus adeptus*. The Neoplatonic origins of this idiosyncratic interpretation of Aristotle’s *De Anima* are even more evident: the highest human faculty is not discursive reason, rather an intellectual power to grasp the intelligible truths as the separate intelligences do. Against this philosophical background one can better understand why it is possible for a human *mente*, to use Dante’s wording, to “see” the eternal light of God.

