

BEFORE AND AFTER THE COMMENTATORS: AN EXERCISE IN PERIODIZATION

A Discussion of Richard Sorabji, *The
Philosophy of the Commentators, 200–600 AD*¹

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1. Sorabji's *Sourcebook* and the 'Sources'

THE edition of the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, sponsored by the Berlin Academy of Sciences, is one of the greatest *monumenta* of nineteenth-century German philology; it was achieved by an extraordinary generation of scholars, whose mastery of *Alttertumswissenschaften* is hardly conceivable (let alone attainable) in the contemporary world.² Yet one should not forget that the whole project was based on the idea, with which contemporary scholars would hardly agree, that the ancient commentaries are principally a tool for the *recensio* and interpretation of Aristotle's treatises; the complete edition of the ancient commentaries was then conceived of as the natural complement to that of Aristotle.³ The idea be-

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Generally this article expresses our common views. Section 2 is by Riccardo Chiaradonna, Section 3 is by Marwan Rashed, while Section 1 is the work of both authors. We would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for helpful suggestions, and to express our deepest gratitude to Brad Inwood for his detailed reading and constructive criticisms.

¹ R. Sorabji (ed.), *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook*, 3 vols. (London: Duckworth, 2004), i. *Psychology (with Ethics and Religion)* [*Psychology*], pp. xv+430; ii. *Physics* [*Physics*], pp. xix+401; iii. *Logic and Metaphysics* [*Logic and Metaphysics*], pp. xvii+394.

² See the remarks in the general introduction at the beginning of each volume (henceforth 'Introduction'), 1–32 at 2.

³ On the project of the CAG see the masterly reviews by H. Usener in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen*, 26 (1892), 1001–22, and K. Praechter in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 18 (1909), 516–38 (repr. in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. H. Dörrie [*Kleine Schriften*])

hind Richard Sorabji's (henceforth S.) *Sourcebook*, i.e. that there is a 'philosophy of the commentators' which *transforms* Aristotle and deserves to be studied in itself (not as ancillary to something else), is rather recent. Philosophy from AD 200 to 600 was obviously not ignored before the current flourishing of research on the commentators: Neoplatonism and late antique thought have traditionally been the focus of considerable interest among classical scholars. Yet the Neoplatonist commentaries on Aristotle were often left aside and their overall impact on twentieth-century scholarship on late antique philosophy was, until recent times, modest.⁴ Notoriously, the situation has changed radically during the last three decades, mostly thanks to S.'s projects.⁵ The huge corpus of the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* is now intensively studied and the philosophy of the commentators is widely recognized as a crucial aspect of ancient thought. The *Sourcebook* can be seen as the crowning of this renaissance of interest.

As the title makes clear, S.'s *Sourcebook* focuses on the 'philosophy of the commentators' from AD 200 to 600. As such, this work may be expected to be a guide to the main philosophical issues raised and concepts used in the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*. Things, however, are somewhat different: many texts included in the *Sourcebook* do not come from the *Commentaria* and the three volumes offer something different from a mere panorama of the extant ancient commentaries on Aristotle. The inclusion of a number of Aristotelian passages is a straightforward choice, since

(Hildesheim and New York, 1973), 282–304; English translation by V. Caston in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and their Influence* [*Aristotle Transformed*] (London, 1990), 31–54).

⁴ It may be interesting to focus on the causes of this fact, but the issue would demand a long discussion, which it is not possible to undertake here. Some main reasons, however, may provisionally be singled out: the first has just been mentioned, namely, that the study of the ancient commentaries was conceived of as pertaining to the interpretation of Aristotle rather than to the study of late antique thought. Furthermore, a certain idea of 'Platonism' (and 'Neoplatonism') as a homogeneous phenomenon (in antiquity and beyond) may have played a significant role in the lack of interest in the commentaries on Aristotle. Finally, late antique philosophy has traditionally been seen as mostly (if not exclusively) theological; accordingly, it was easy to regard the commentaries on Aristotle as out of the main scope of 'Neoplatonism' (the metaphysical and theological interpretation of Plato).

⁵ Details in J. Sellars, 'The Aristotelian Commentators: A Bibliographical Guide', in P. Adamson, H. Baltussen, and M. Stone (eds.), *Philosophy, Science, and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic, and Latin Commentaries*, vol. i [*Philosophy, Science, and Exegesis*, i] (London, 2004), 239–68.

the 'philosophy of the commentators' originates from the exegesis of Aristotle. The *Sourcebook*, however, includes more than that: the discussion often focuses on authors such as Galen or Plotinus, the commentaries on Plato by Proclus and Damascius occupy an important position in the collection, the Church Fathers are also represented, etc. This is an apparently strange fact. As S. makes clear, a sourcebook on the commentators faces the opposite problem from that tackled in Long and Sedley's *Hellenistic Philosophers*.⁶ 'Instead of there being too little material surviving, there is too much' ('Introduction', 5). Selection and lack of completeness are, then, unavoidable: the *Sourcebook* 'is meant to offer not the last word, but a first assembling of texts, to make them accessible, so that others can make new discoveries, offer new interpretations and fill gaps' ('Introduction', 5).

Remarks such as these make the situation mentioned above even more puzzling: if the *Commentaria* offer such a wealth of material that a sourcebook cannot aim to be complete, why should one add *further* material to the collection? A remark on Plotinus may help us to understand this choice and will shed some light on the *rationale* that underlies this collection of sources: S. claims that 'often, it turns out, Plotinus is the only extant source which explains the background ideas that the Neoplatonist commentators were discussing' ('Introduction', 4). As S. makes clear (*ibid.*), his *Sourcebook* is not, and is not designed to be, a sourcebook on Neoplatonism. Yet the main philosophical ideas of most of the commentators cannot be separated from late antique Platonism, for the very simple reason that all the commentators later than Alexander were Platonist philosophers. Furthermore, Neoplatonism does not emerge from a vacuum and its genesis can be understood only against the wider background of philosophy around AD 200. Both a certain lack of completeness and reference to a wider background seem, then, to be unavoidable. This may actually raise some problems and, in order correctly to assess the merits and limits of S.'s approach, it is necessary to outline what he seeks to do and where.

The three volumes of the *Sourcebook* include, after an introduction, an average of twenty chapters each, representing twenty philosophical topics. Each topic is further broken down into an average

⁶ A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1987).

of half a dozen subtopics, so that between them the three volumes cover some 360 subtopics in philosophy. Volume i deals with psychology, together with ethics and religion, volume ii with physics, and volume iii with logic and metaphysics. When S. says that this is not a sourcebook on Neoplatonism, he explains that it includes some non-Platonist commentators (Aspasius and Alexander) and does not seek to cover all the issues that are essential to Neoplatonism. For example, Proclus' complex doctrine of henads is largely omitted from the *Sourcebook*: unsurprisingly so, since most of it is irrelevant to the philosophical questions raised in the commentaries on Aristotle. Of course, for Alexander of Aphrodisias the reinterpretation of Aristotle, in order to counter developments in rival schools over the intervening 500 years, will have been a (or rather *the*) primary aim. But this was not such an important aim for the Neoplatonists. To them the Aristotelian texts were a preliminary subject for their students before the reading of Plato (although Neoplatonist interpretations of Plato were, indeed, often deeply influenced by the reading of Aristotle). This may be regarded as a further part of S.'s reason for disclaiming any intention of explaining Neoplatonism as a whole.

If this explains some of S.'s omissions, what about his insertions in the *Sourcebook* from outside the corpus of commentaries on Aristotle? Quite often the philosophical theories and concepts used in that corpus are better explained on the basis of material outside that corpus. In addition, S. aims to make the philosophical ideas in the commentaries better known to a wide range of disciplines: not only to scholars of ancient philosophy, but also to historians of science, to scholars of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, to philosophers, to theologians, to scholars of commentary in other disciplines and languages, etc. ('Introduction', 5). The early Church Fathers, for example, often have related theories sometimes influenced by the philosophy of the commentators. The familiarity of such theories to scholars of Patristics is arguably an important reason for directing their attention to the pagan texts. Scholars with a different interest, for example in late antique philosophy after Alexander taken as a whole, would certainly make a different selection of topics. Yet it was the interpretation of Aristotle, first by Alexander and then through the lens of the Neoplatonists, that most influenced the Islamic and Christian Middle Ages. This historical fact is probably part of what influenced S.'s choice of focus.

If this explains some of the questions asked above, there is at least one further issue that needs to be raised. S.'s study of the commentators focuses on the philosophical ideas in their works. Accordingly, when S. speaks of 'background', he is speaking of the background to philosophical ideas. Others have looked to other kinds of background, which at least in these volumes S. does not discuss in depth. As a matter of fact, the idea of background has often been used in order to refer to the common 'school background' of late antique authors (handbooks, terminology, curricula, exegetical methods, etc.).⁷ This is a perfectly plausible choice, and 'background studies' have significantly improved our knowledge of late antique philosophical traditions. In the *Sourcebook* S.'s discussion of the methodology of the commentators is strikingly brief; for a more extensive treatment he refers to the collection of papers *Aristotle Transformed* that he edited in 1990.⁸ This choice is perhaps open to criticism; yet the consequences of S.'s focus on the philosophical (rather than methodological) background of the commentators may still be seen as interesting and fruitful. As noted above, studies on the school background of Neoplatonist philosophers have flourished in recent decades, to the extent that the very notion of 'exegesis' (or 'exegetical philosophy') has sometimes come to be regarded as the key for understanding post-Hellenistic and late antique philosophy. For all of its merits, such an overall approach also has some limits and may give rise to a rather non-philosophical picture of post-Hellenistic and late antique thought; as a matter of fact, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that late antique philosophy has sometimes been treated as a tradition dominated by librarians or by exegetical schools, where study of the teaching practice connected to the reading of and commentary on the authoritative texts replaces a genuine interest in philosophical arguments.⁹ Conclusions such as these do not convey the

⁷ Suffice it to refer to J. Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context: Hippolytus' Elenchos as a Source for Greek Philosophy* (Leiden, 1992), and *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden, 1994).

⁸ See *Logic and Metaphysics*, 37. See also I. Hadot *et al.* (trans. and comm.), *Simplicius: Commentaire sur les Catégories*, vol. i (Leiden, 1990); P. Hoffmann, 'La fonction des prologues exégétiques dans la pensée pédagogique néoplatonicienne', in B. Roussel and J.-D. Dubois (eds.), *Entrer en matière* (Paris, 1998), 209–45. On the ongoing debate see the papers collected in C. D'Ancona (ed.), *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists* (Leiden, 2007).

⁹ Some contributions of Pierre Hadot tend to convey this idea: see his papers collected in *Études de philosophie ancienne* (Paris, 1999), e.g. his influential 'Théologie,

extreme wealth and complexity of late antique thought. Indeed, the commentators *are* exegetes, but their way of interpreting the texts largely depends on their philosophical ideas: it would be deeply inadequate to explain the genesis and character of late antique philosophical ideas as if they were merely determined by the interpretation of the authoritative texts. Rather, it should be noted that late antique philosophers came to develop different (and sometimes alternative) interpretations of the authoritative texts in virtue of their different philosophical ideas and assumptions. S.'s deliberate brevity in this book about the methodological and exegetical background of the commentators thus has the welcome consequence of giving full weight to their philosophical arguments and positions.

None the less, there could have been other ways of bringing out the commentators' philosophical interest in Aristotle. S. treats it in more or less the same way as Long and Sedley treat their subjects in *Hellenistic Philosophers*. But it would have been possible, instead, to present a selection of places where the commentators work hard to elucidate the obscurities of Aristotle's text, to discuss at length the different options suggested by their predecessors, to weigh the alternative merits of the transmitted readings, etc. It would of course have been less interesting for the modern reader, whom S. is seeking to engage, but the project would have been neither absurd nor less well founded. We could imagine, for example, a book entitled *A Thousand and One Aristotelian Obscurities in the Light of the Commentators*, which would introduce the reader to all these unknown battles fought by our brave commentators against the Master's refractory text. We could even ask ourselves whether the commentators' digressions are really more 'philosophical' than their exegesis of the letter of Aristotle's and Plato's text. No doubt S. would not want to attempt this in the very same book as his overview of philosophical ideas. But he would surely agree that this would help to complete the picture of philosophical commentary on Aristotle.

2. Plotinus, the commentators, and the development of late antique thought

S.'s illuminating arrangement of and commentary on texts makes it possible fully to appreciate the crucial transformations that oc-

exégèse, révélation, écriture dans la philosophie grecque', 27–58 (originally published in M. Tardieu (ed.), *Les Règles de l'interprétation* (Paris, 1987), 13–34).

curred in philosophy during the third century AD. The key figures in this turn are Alexander of Aphrodisias and Plotinus, who radically changed the philosophical panorama and laid the basis for the developments that unfolded during later centuries. In fact, focusing on the reception of Aristotle by Alexander and Plotinus allows a detailed understanding of the transition from ‘post-Hellenistic’ to ‘late antique’ philosophy. The discussion of Plotinus’ views on knowledge and that of Alexander’s theory of essential form will provide sufficient illustration of these facts.

(a) *Theory of knowledge*

Epistemology and theory of knowledge cover several chapters of the *Sourcebook*, in both the first and third volumes. Chapter 3 of *Psychology* (86–133) bears the title ‘Thought’; the list of subsections is substantial enough to include all the main issues of late antique theory of knowledge.

First (3(a)) S. presents a selection of texts concerning the difference between ‘intellect’ and ‘reason’. The list is short and has a somewhat programmatic intent: it is designed to introduce the main distinction (probably the one we find most controversial) that occurs in Neoplatonic epistemology, that between discursive and intuitive thought. The list of texts deserves some comment. It contains a *locus classicus* from *Rep.* 6, 511 D 6–E 2 (line analogy with the distinction between *dianoia* and *noēsis*), followed by two Aristotelian passages from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (6. 8, 1142^a25–6 and 1143^a35–^b5). The selection from Aristotle is rather surprising. Indeed, the notion of ‘understanding’ has a significant position in Aristotle’s ethics,¹⁰ but one may ask whether these are really the most relevant parallels for outlining the background ideas of the commentators. The lines on *nous* from *Post. An.* 2. 19 (100^b5–17), which S. postpones until later in the *Psychology* volume (173–4), would have been relevant here. Interestingly, ‘Philoponus’ (*In An. Post.* 439. 5–7; 440. 6–10 Wallies)¹¹ equates the *nous praktikos* with *logismos* (see *Post. An.* 2. 19, 100^b7), i.e. to discursive reasoning that can be true or false, thus opposing it to the theoretical *nous* of *Post.*

¹⁰ See R. Sorabji, ‘Aristotle on the Role of Intellect in Virtue’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, NS 74 (1973–4), 107–29.

¹¹ On the authorship of the commentary on *Post. An.* 2, traditionally attributed to Philoponus, see now O. Goldin (trans. and comm.), *Philoponus (?): On Aristotle, Posterior Analytics 2* (London, 2009).

An. 2. 19, whose activity refers to the unchangingly true beings (*In An. Post. 439. 7–11 Wallies*).

S. singles out two texts in order to present the general distinction between reason (a ‘step by step process’) and intellect in Neoplatonism. The first comes from Boethius’ *Consolatio* (4, prose 6, section 17) and opposes the extended and moving character of *ratiocinatio* to the stability of *intellectus*. The second text comes from Plotinus’ treatise *On Eternity and Time* (3. 7 [45]. 11. 35–45) and associates *dianoia* with the intrinsically transitional kind of activity of the soul (i.e. time, which is the ‘life of the soul’). As a matter of fact, in these lines Plotinus does not focus on the distinction between *nous* and *dianoia* (or *logismos*); instead, he presents discursive reasoning as the kind of thinking proper to soul and stresses its connection with time. However, the selection of Plotinus at the very beginning of this long chapter cannot but be approved and, again, it can be seen as somewhat programmatic, since Plotinus turns out to be crucial for understanding the discussions of the commentators on this topic and their philosophical significance.

After ‘reason’ and ‘intellect’, S. focuses (3(c))¹² on ‘opivative reason’ (as opposed to ‘scientific reason’). The texts discussed treat opinion as a kind of reasoning acquired ‘empirically in Aristotle’s manner’ (88) from perceptibles, reasoning that is different from perception but lower than *dianoia*. The list includes a difficult passage from Syrianus’ *In Metaph.* (50. 6–9 Kroll) and a set of passages from Proclus’ *In Timaeum*. The argument of Proclus’ *In Tim. 2, i. 248. 14–22 Diehl* (3(c)2) is extremely interesting: Proclus traces back to Plato’s *Theaetetus* (186 c) the idea according to which perception (differently from *dianoia*) is ignorant of *ousia*. Then he singles out opinion (*doxa*) as distinct from perception, in that it knows the essences of the perceptibles through the *logoi* in itself. Opinion, however, is different from reasoning in that it does not know the causes. Proclus employs the Aristotelian distinction between ‘the fact’ (*to hoti*) and the explanation (see *Post. An. 2. 1*) in order to convey the difference between opinion and scientific understanding (*epistēmē*).¹³ Such a combination of Platonic and Aristotelian elements was, indeed, not new, and section 3(c) also

¹² Section 3(b) is a mere corollary to 3(a) and focuses on the relation of intellect and reason to pleasure and desire.

¹³ It is noteworthy that the use of this Aristotelian distinction within an overall Platonist doctrinal framework is already well attested in the anonymous commentary on the *Theaetetus* (col. III. 3–7).

has the function of setting late antique classifications of reasoning against their post-Aristotelian background. S. rightly refers to parallels in Alcinous, who develops at some length the distinction between ‘opinative’ and ‘scientific’ reason in *Didaskalikos*, ch. 4 (parts of which are translated in 1(a)2–5: 154. 25–9; 156. 1–6; 156. 8–11; 154. 40–155. 5 Hermann). Alcinous’ epistemology actually provides an early document of the combination of Platonic ‘innatistic’ and Aristotelian ‘abstractionist’ elements (with a distinctive use of Stoic terms and notions), which also characterizes the epistemology of the commentators:¹⁴ for example, Porphyry’s long epistemological excursus in the commentary on Ptolemy’s *Harmonics* (12–15 Düring) provides basically a much more developed and refined version of the same overall doctrine that we find in the *Didaskalikos*; further parallels can be found elsewhere, in the ancient commentators (and beyond).¹⁵

By the end of 3(c), S. has first outlined the main distinction between discursive reason and intellect as presented in some ‘programmatic’ texts; then he has completed the overview of different kinds of reasoning by discussing opinative reason; Plato, Aristotle, and the post-Aristotelian philosophical traditions have been brought into focus. The survey may follow, at this point, a rather conventional path, with a somewhat predictable selection of themes from the commentators from Alexander of Aphrodisias onwards (*phantasia* and passive intellect, active intellect, etc.) and some passing references to Plotinus, who obviously echoes these distinctions. Such an overview, however, would not in any way convey the distinctive character of the late antique discussions, and S. is perfectly aware of that. Here, as elsewhere, Plotinus plays a key role in that (i) he provides a most radical and peculiar interpretation of the philosophical ideas of his time and (ii) his distinctive theories turn out to be crucial for understanding the later tradition.

(b) *Plotinus*

Sections 3(d), (e), and (f), then, are devoted to distinctive Plotinian theories (‘Non-discursive thought: is it propositional?’; ‘Plotinus’

¹⁴ Further details in R. Chiaradonna, ‘Platonismo e teoria della conoscenza stoica tra II e III secolo d. C.’, in M. Bonazzi and C. Helmig (eds.), *Platonic Stoicism—Stoic Platonism: The Dialogue between Platonism and Stoicism in Antiquity* (Leuven, 2007), 209–42.

¹⁵ See the excellent selection of texts in *Logic and Metaphysics*, 5(c)ii, 138–42: ‘Aristotelian assembled concepts and Platonic recollected concepts’.

undescended soul'; 'The unconscious'); most reasonably, S. comes back to the commentators only after presenting the main aspects of Plotinus' epistemology. Section 3(d) focuses on a much-debated issue, that of the 'propositional' or 'non-propositional' character of non-discursive thought. The survey is predictably opened by two celebrated Aristotelian texts, *DA* 3. 6, 430^b26–9, and *Metaph.* Θ 10, 1051^b17–33; notoriously, Aristotle refers here to the act of thinking of incomposite subjects (*adiaireta*; *asuntheta*), in which we do not predicate anything of anything, nor make an assertion. S. resists a non-propositional interpretation of the passages and argues that Aristotle could be thinking of definitions of non-complex entities.¹⁶ More than twenty years ago, S. claimed in a famous debate with A. C. Lloyd that the same holds for Plotinus' non-discursive thinking of divine Intellect, which, according to S., could be interpreted as propositional. Against S., Lloyd argued that the thinking of the Intellect is a *totum simul* and is so unified that it does not involve as such any complexity: accordingly, the non-discursive thinking of the Intellect should be opposed sharply to discursive and propositional reason (for any proposition is composed of at least a subject and a predicate).¹⁷ Interestingly, in the intervening years S. has changed his mind: in the *Sourcebook* he sides with Lloyd and remarks soberly that 'in Plotinus, however, as Lloyd replied to Sorabji, the thinking of intellect is viewed as non-propositional in contrast to the discursive thinking of reason' (*Psychology*, 91). 'However' marks the distinction from Aristotle: as S. implicitly suggests, then, it is in Plotinus that a fully developed theory of intellectual, non-discursive, and non-propositional thinking comes up for the first time in ancient philosophy (such a conclusion is obviously open to different assessments, and Plotinus' contribution to ancient epistemology may also be criticized as entailing extra-rational features). Interestingly, since the publication of the *Sourcebook* some substantial studies have been devoted to Plotinus' theory of Intellect. In general, Lloyd's conclusions are accepted, but only in a qualified way. It is generally agreed that the thinking of Intellect is not propositional and does not require conformity to external things or states of affairs in order to be true (see 5. 5 [32]. 18–19), but it has also

¹⁶ See R. Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle's Theory* (London and Ithaca, NY, 1980), 213–19.

¹⁷ See R. Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum [Time, Creation]* (London and Ithaca, NY, 1983), 137–56 ('Myths about Non-Propositional Thought'); A. C. Lloyd, 'Non-Propositional Thought in Plotinus', *Phronesis*, 31 (1986), 258–65.

been noted that intellectual thought is intrinsically multiple and complex, although the structure of such a perfectly interconnected multiplicity differs from that of discursive reason. The mere characterization of Intellect as ‘all at once’ and the distinction from discursive reasoning run the risk of conveying (without further qualification) the false idea that intellectual thinking is an intrinsically simple and undifferentiated intuition.¹⁸

S.’s selection of Plotinian texts on non-propositional intellect contains some famous passages from 5. 8 [31]. 5–6; 5. 5 [32]. 1; 5. 3 [49]. 10. These texts are extremely important for understanding Plotinus’ doctrine, but, in order to get an adequate idea of the issues involved in non-propositional thinking, one should also add some further passages which S. presents in different sections: in particular, Plotinus’ views of non-discursive thinking are closely connected with his highly distinctive interpretation of the ‘Aristotelian’ thesis concerning the identity between intellect and intelligible (texts in 3(k)6–13), and with his ideas on self-reflexive thinking and self-awareness (see 4(a)13–16, where S. includes substantial parts of the key chapter 5. 3 [49]. 5). Unfortunately, such connections are not always made sufficiently explicit: perhaps a more substantial list of cross-references would have made the use of the *Sourcebook* easier (and more fruitful).

Such a minor objection, however, should not conceal the great merits of S.’s treatment. By his arrangement, S. draws attention to the double position of Plotinus in late antique thought: on the one hand, Plotinus establishes the overall philosophical background for later Platonists; on the other hand, later Platonists often qualify (and even reject) Plotinus’ most distinctive theories. The picture of ‘ancient Neoplatonism’ as a basically homogeneous tradition of thought that smoothly evolved from Plotinus to the late Neoplatonists, as if from the implicit to the explicit, is then somewhat oversimplified;¹⁹ S.’s admirable synthesis makes this fact extremely

¹⁸ See P. Remes, *Plotinus on Self: The Philosophy of the ‘We’* (Cambridge, 2007), 126–9. E. K. Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect* (Oxford, 2007), 14 and 185–8, has interestingly come to the conclusion that non-discursive thought is complex (against Lloyd) but non-propositional (against S.’s early view).

¹⁹ For a nice statement of this view see I. Hadot, ‘Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 1,3–3,17 Kalbfleisch: An Important Contribution to the History of the Ancient Commentary’, *Rheinisches Museum*, 147 (2004), 408–20 at 415: ‘The Neoplatonic *system* evolves constantly towards an ever more pronounced *systematization*, and an ever more precise diversification of the various levels of reality, all the while maintaining its identity, so that there is evolution, but not revolution’ (my italics). Despite

clear, and this is one of the work's most important merits. The complex and ambivalent position of later Platonists toward Plotinus emerges in section 3(d): S. refers to a number of passages in Proclus, where higher thinking is 'un-Plotinically' conceived of as propositional (see *In Parm.* 72. 33–74. 2 Klibansky=3(d)6). However, S. also points out that *other* passages in Proclus seem to go the other way and contrast intellect, which thinks Forms 'all as one', with discursive reason, which sees them one by one (see *In Parm.* 807. 20 ff. Steel etc.). To say the least, Proclus does not always seem to share Plotinus' care in distinguishing higher and lower forms of thinking. It is, however, in section 3(e) that Plotinus' peculiar position in the history of late antique philosophy emerges in full clarity. This section is devoted to Plotinus' celebrated doctrine according to which a part of each individual's human soul does not descend from the intelligible world; this undescended aspect of the individual soul makes each single man in principle capable of sharing the perfect life and the non-discursive thinking that belong to the divine Intellect.

In his short presentation, S. argues that the undescended part of the soul is 'like Aristotle's active intellect, uninterruptedly thinking, and this requires the further idea that the thought is usually unconscious' (*Psychology*, 93–4). Indeed, the connection between Plotinus' undescended soul and Aristotle's active intellect is well established: it was brought forth by the ancient commentators (more on that below) and this idea was fully developed by Philip Merlan, who believed that Plotinus aimed to solve by his theory some intrinsic difficulties of Aristotle's theory of active intellect as interpreted by Alexander of Aphrodisias.²⁰ Yet, here more than elsewhere, S. should arguably have included more of the *Platonic*

the criticisms levelled at many of his conclusions, the overall picture of late antique thought drawn by K. Praechter in his masterly article 'Richtungen und Schulen im Neuplatonismus', in *Carl Robert zum 8. März 1910: Genethliakon. Überreicht von der Graeca Halensis* (Berlin, 1910), 105–56 (repr. in *Kleine Schriften*, 165–216), is, in our view, still perfectly convincing.

²⁰ See P. Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Metaconsciousness: Problems of the Soul in the Neo-Aristotelian and Neoplatonic Tradition*, 2nd edn. (The Hague, 1969), 10 ff., 47–52. A survey of the principal interpretations of Plotinus' undescended soul is given by A. Linguisti, 'La felicità dell'anima non discesa', in A. Brancacci (ed.), *Antichi e moderni nella filosofia di età imperiale* (Naples, 2001), 213–36 at 218–19. For further discussion see C. Tornau, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un individu? Unité, individualité et conscience de soi dans la métaphysique plotinienne de l'âme', *Études philosophiques* (2009/3), 333–60.

background of Plotinus' theory, which (as argued by T. A. Szlezák some thirty years ago) is actually overwhelming.²¹ Indeed, Plotinus' characterization of the undescended soul starts from the interpretation of some well-known Platonic texts (the myth about the hyper-ouranic vision of *Phdr.* 247 A ff.; the description of the soul's true nature in *Rep.* 10, 611 A–612 A; and further passages from the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*), and a correct assessment of this theory cannot be separated from that of Plotinus' reading of Plato. Yet, for all of its partiality, S.'s survey draws attention successfully to the philosophical significance of Plotinus' theory and to its position for the later tradition; to a certain extent, the lack of interest in the Platonic exegetical background is even refreshing. As a matter of fact, the overemphasizing of the Platonic background of Plotinus' undescended soul can easily lead to disappointing results: here, as always, a mere (somewhat pedantic) enumeration of parallels and naïve source-hunting by no means suffice for understanding the character of Plotinus' distinctive philosophical approach. Plotinus overtly connects his views on the soul to the interpretation of some controversial passages in Plato (see esp. 4. 8 [6]. 1. 23–50), but it would be grossly misleading to argue that Plotinus' theory can be *explained* as an exegetical attempt to make sense of some problematic texts from the dialogues. The opposite is rather the case: as a matter of fact, Plotinus' reading of Plato is constantly determined by his distinctive philosophical project and by the basic ideas that shape his 'version' of Platonism (for example, such 'basic ideas' are different from those that shape the Platonism of Porphyry, Iamblichus, or Proclus).²²

Notoriously, Plotinus' views on the higher soul were debated by later Platonists, and most of Plotinus' successors (except for Theodorus of Asine, whose views on the undescended soul are,

²¹ See T. A. Szlezák, *Platon und Aristoteles in der Nuslehre Plotins* (Basle and Stuttgart, 1979), 167–205.

²² Plotinus' views on the undescended soul are arguably part of a highly coherent philosophical project (Plotinus' distinctive 'kind of Platonism'), based on the idea that intelligible realities should be conceived of 'in themselves', in an adequate way and according to their appropriate principles (see 6. 5 [23]. 1–2), without in any way taking perceptible realities and their structure as a starting-point for the understanding of true beings. Accordingly, the undescended soul lays the epistemological basis for the development of a 'science of intelligible being as such', in that it makes it possible (even 'here below', before the separation of our soul from the body, see e.g. 4. 4 [28]. 5. 5–8) to understand appropriately the nature of intelligible being and to share its distinctive non-discursive way of thinking. Further details in R. Chiaradonna, *Plotino* (Rome, 2009), 102–15.

however, impossible to determine with precision) rejected his theory.²³ S.'s survey starts predictably with 4. 8 [6]. 8. 1–11=3(e)1, where Plotinus argues (against the opinion of other philosophers, whose identity is a matter of debate) that 'not even our soul descends in its entirety, but a part of it remains in the Intelligible'. This passage is followed by another famous text, Proclus, *In Tim.* 5, iii. 333. 28–334. 15 Diehl=3(e)2 (quoting Iamblichus' objections), whose argument is aimed against the view of Plotinus and Theodorus, 'who take care to preserve an impassible element in us, one which is always in contemplation'.²⁴ The passages in 3(e) make it impressively clear how much Plotinus' views were discussed and criticized by later Platonists. Indeed, several texts from Proclus have an extremely important position in the reception of Plotinus' ideas (see especially the famous prop. 211 from *ET*=3(e)12), but it is also extremely interesting to remark how deeply Plotinus' undescended soul shaped the philosophical background of the Aristotelian commentary tradition.²⁵ S. includes three passages from 'Simplicius' commentary on *De anima* and 'Philoponus' commentary on *DA* 3,²⁶ which present a criticism of Plotinus'

²³ See C. Steel, *Il Sé che cambia: l'anima nel tardo Neoplatonismo. Giamblico, Damascio e Prisciano*, ed. L. I. Martone (Bari, 2006) (Italian updated edition of C. Steel, *The Changing Self: A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism. Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus* (Brussels, 1978)).

²⁴ Significantly, despite his overt criticism, Iamblichus is sometimes regarded by the later tradition as a defender of the undescended soul, and this may refer to the fact that he apparently allowed something of the kind for *certain special* souls (see 3(e)5–8 and the texts collected in *Psychology*, 18(b), 'Theurgy'). Yet, even if this is true, one should not overemphasize the similarity between Iamblichus and Plotinus: as a matter of fact, Plotinus' epistemological assumptions, which underlie his idea of the higher soul, refer to the cognitive faculties of each man *as such* and are not designed to characterize the status of a special group of 'pure' souls as opposed to the others.

²⁵ S.'s approach in this section parallels that of H. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretations of De anima [Aristotle and Neoplatonism]* (Ithaca, NY, 1996).

²⁶ The authorship of these commentaries is a much-debated question. As argued by Bossier and Steel—and more recently by C. Steel in *Priscian: On Theophrastus' On Sense-Perception* (trans. P. Huby) with 'Simplicius': On Aristotle's *On the Soul* 2. 5–2. 12 (trans. C. Steel), in collaboration with J. O. Urmson, notes by P. Lautner (London, 1997), 105–40—Priscianus Lydus is probably the author of 'Simplicius' commentary (*contra*, see I. Hadot, 'Simplicius or Priscianus? On the Author of the Commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* (CAG. IX): A Methodological Study', *Mnemosyne*, 55 (2002), 159–99); further discussion in M. Perkams, *Selbstbewusstsein in der Spätantike: Die neuplatonische Kommentare zu Aristoteles De anima* (Berlin and New York, 2008). As argued by Hayduck, Stephanus of Alexandria is probably the author of 'Philoponus' commentary: see W. Charlton (trans. and comm.),

views that (i) what Aristotle ‘calls “actual intellect” is human intellect that thinks always’ (‘Philop.’ *In DA* 3, 535. 12–16 Hayduck=3(e)14) and (ii) a part of us remains unchanging and pure so that it does not proceed altogether into coming to be (‘Simpl.’ *In DA* 6. 8–15 Hayduck=3(e)15).

The distinction between active and passive intellect is probably the most studied doctrine of the ancient commentators (starting at least from Moraux’s classic book on Alexander of Aphrodisias),²⁷ and S.’s outline follows a well-established path. After the canonical reference to *DA* 3. 5, 430^a10–25 (=3(g)1), the list includes a passage on Theophrastus from Themistius (*In DA* 108. 18–109. 3 Heinze=3(g)2; see FHS&G 320A) and Alexander’s famous text (*DA* 89. 9–18 Bruns=3(g)3), where the active intellect is equated with the first cause (i.e. God). Alexander’s views are expounded in detail in 3(g)4–11; here the reader can find a convenient selection of texts from his *De anima* and from the *Mantissa* § 2 (= *De intellectu*), which illustrate Alexander’s views on the causal role of active intellect in the formation of concepts (notoriously, ‘Alexander’s’ accounts in the two works have sometimes been regarded as incompatible and the authorship of the *De intellectu* is disputed).²⁸ The later tradition is also represented by a selection of passages from Themistius, ‘Philoponus’, and ‘Simplicius’. S. includes a long text from ‘Philoponus’, *In DA* 3 (535. 4–539. 12 Hayduck=3(g)18), where some canonical opinions on active intellect are first expounded in detail and then criticized. ‘Philoponus’ doxography includes Plotinus, Marinus, Plutarch of Athens, and Alexander: Plutarch of Athens and ‘Philoponus’ think that the active intellect is human and descended, Marinus thinks it is an angelic or daemonic being, Plotinus an undescended soul, Alexander God. It is worth noting again how far Plotinus’ views are fully integrated within late antique exegesis of Aristotle, to the extent that Plotinus is actually treated as one of the commentators and his ideas on the higher soul are regarded as an exegesis of Aristotle.²⁹

‘Philoponus’: On Aristotle *On the Soul* 3. 1–8 (London, 2000), 1–15, and C. Tornau, ‘Bemerkungen zu Stephanos von Alexandria, Plotin und Plutarch von Athen’ [‘Bemerkungen’], *Elenchos*, 28 (2007), 105–27.

²⁷ See P. Moraux, *Alexandre d’Aphrodise, exégète de la noétique d’Aristote* (Liège and Paris, 1942).

²⁸ See now the discussion in R. Sharples (ed. and comm.), *Alexander Aphrodisiensis: De anima libri mantissa* (Berlin and New York, 2008), 148–58.

²⁹ On Plotinus’ position in the ps.-Philoponus doxography see the remarks in Blu-

This is but an example of S.'s illuminating use of Plotinus; as a cursory reading of the indexes suffices to make clear, passages from the *Enneads* are quoted in virtually every chapter of the *Sourcebook*. Indeed, it has often been noted well before S.'s *Sourcebook* that the commentators occasionally discuss Plotinus (suffice it to refer to the abundant literature on the relation between Plotinus' treatment of the categories in *Enn.* 6. 1–3 [42–4] and the later commentary tradition from Porphyry onwards). Yet S.'s survey reveals for the first time how extensive and systematic is the presence of Plotinus in the shaping of late antique exegesis of Aristotle: Plotinus has, in this respect, a position parallel to that of Alexander of Aphrodisias, as both philosophers lay the basis for the later reception of Aristotle. Obviously, this does not mean that their views were unanimously accepted (as noted above, the contrary is quite often the case), but—as S. puts it—without constantly referring to Plotinus' most distinctive theories it is simply impossible to understand the background ideas that the later commentators were discussing. Interestingly, the presence of Plotinus in the later commentaries on Aristotle differs significantly from that of the Platonists before Plotinus. Indeed, the Neoplatonist commentators refer occasionally to the pre-Plotinian Platonic authors: this holds especially for the interpretation of the *Categories*, where, as emerges from Simplicius, Platonists such as Eudorus, Nicostratus, or Atticus played a significant role and sometimes even laid the basis for Plotinus' discussion.³⁰ Yet the number and the significance of such references are globally modest, and this (among other things) may suggest that Platonists before Plotinus were, with some exceptions, not extensively familiar with Aristotle.³¹

menthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism*, 22 and 169, and the in-depth discussion in Tornau, 'Bemerkungen'.

³⁰ There is an extensive literature on this; see the survey in R. Chiaradonna, *Sostanza movimento analogia: Plotino critico di Aristotele* (Naples, 2002), 40–54.

³¹ The issue is, however, controversial. G. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry [Agreement]* (Oxford, 2006), has recently discussed a considerable amount of evidence and presented ingenious arguments in favour of the opposite conclusion, i.e. that Platonists from Antiochus onwards were extensively acquainted with Aristotle. For a criticism of some of his conclusions see R. Chiaradonna's review in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 90 (2008), 229–34.

(c) 100 BC to AD 200

As a matter of fact, what we know about philosophy from 100 BC to AD 200 shows that Aristotelianism was but one philosophical current among others (the same holds for Platonism in its multiple varieties).³² Notoriously, Hellenistic philosophies were alive well into the second century and the practice of commenting on Aristotle's school treatises did not usually extend outside Peripatetic philosophers.³³ This general conclusion obviously allows for some remarkable exceptions: for example, Eudorus certainly knew *Categories*, *Metaphysics A*, and possibly other parts of the *Metaphysics*; the *Categories* were intensively debated among Platonists and Stoics; the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus* is acquainted with (parts of) Aristotle's *Topics* and Plutarch is at ease with Aristotle's ethics.³⁴ The significance of such exceptions should, however, not be overestimated; in fact, even those pre-Plotinian Platonist philosophers who actually discussed Aristotelian doctrines and notions often do not seem to rely on a wide reading of the school treatises. Their discussions are rather schematic, to the extent that they have, not unreasonably, been understood as being based on second-hand sources rather than on a direct knowledge of Aristotle's works;³⁵ even if this hypothesis is not accepted, it can plausibly be assumed that close study of Aristotle's corpus was not the main focus of Platonists before Plotinus. This situation changes, somewhat abruptly, after AD 200, when the 'age of

³² On philosophy from 100 BC to AD 200 see now the papers collected in R. W. Sharples and R. Sorabji (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy 100 BC–200 AD*, [*Greek and Roman Philosophy*] 2 vols. (London, 2007).

³³ Galen (who, however, cannot be regarded as a Platonist without substantial qualifications) represents the only true exception to this: see the list of his exegetical works on Aristotle in *Lib. prop.* 47 K.=171. 9–172. 2 Boudon-Millot. In fact, Porphyry can be regarded as the first Platonist commentator on Aristotle: see G. Karamanolis, 'Porphyry: The First Platonist Commentator on Aristotle', in Adamson, Baltussen, and Stone (eds.), *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis*, i. 97–120.

³⁴ On Eudorus see M. Bonazzi, 'Eudorus of Alexandria and Early Imperial Platonism', in Sharples and Sorabji (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, 365–77; on the anonymous commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus* see D. Sedley's commentary in G. Bastianini and D. Sedley (ed. and comm.), *Commentarium in Platonis Theaetetus*, in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini*, iii (Florence, 1995), 227–562 at 508–14; on Plutarch and Aristotle's ethics see Karamanolis, *Agreement*, 115–23. See the survey in P. Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias*, vol. ii [*Aristotelismus*, ii] (Berlin and New York, 1984).

³⁵ See e.g. the remarks on Atticus in P. Moraux, *Aristotelismus*, ii. 580.

the commentators' begins.³⁶ Alexander of Aphrodisias had a key position in this transition, as he developed (or at least codified) a systematic overall interpretation of Aristotle, whose impact on later thinkers was immense: the fact that Alexander was probably the *last* Aristotelian commentator³⁷ should not conceal his importance for the later *Platonist* tradition, where Aristotle was very often read and understood through Alexander's exegesis.³⁸

It was arguably Alexander's reading that (at least in part) laid the basis for Plotinus' constant critical dialogue with Aristotle: the parallels between Plotinus and Alexander (on issues such as the immanent form, the structure of the soul, matter, providence and its causality, etc.) are actually too distinctive to depend merely on their common background.³⁹ Plotinus' extensive knowledge of Aristotle's treatises (which, it is worth repeating, would probably

³⁶ That the transition from the 2nd to the 3rd cent. AD marks a crucial turn in the history of ancient philosophy is remarked by e.g. M. Frede, 'Epilogue', in K. A. Algra, J. Barnes, J. Mansfeld, and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1999), 771–97 at 793–7.

³⁷ See R. W. Sharples, 'The School of Alexander?', in Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed*, 83–111 at 111: 'as far as our information goes he seems to mark the end of a distinctive and continuous Peripatetic tradition'. On Themistius' Peripatetic allegiance and its limits see the judicious remarks in Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism*, 37.

³⁸ Alexander's position for the later commentators has been the subject of some recent studies, which show that Alexander provides the standard exegesis of Aristotle for the later tradition. On the relation between Porphyry's views on universals and those of Alexander see *Logic and Metaphysics*, 156–7 (5(f)), and R. Chiaradonna, 'What is Porphyry's *Isagoge*?', *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*, 19 (2008), 1–30; on the relation between Syrianus and Alexander see C. Luna, *Trois études sur la tradition des commentaires anciens à la Métaphysique d'Aristote* (Leiden, 2001), 72–98. It is worth quoting in full Luna's remarks at 72: 'L'attitude de Syrianus à l'égard d'Alexandre est claire: le commentaire d'Alexandre fournit l'exégèse littérale précise et définitive, qui rend en quelque sorte superflu toute tentative d'expliquer le texte aristotélicien.' On Alexander as a source of Simplicius' *In Phys.* see M. Rashed, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise: Commentaire perdu à la Physique d'Aristote. Les scholies byzantines* (Berlin and New York, forthcoming). On Alexander's *In De caelo* and its role for the later commentators see A. Rescigno, *Alessandro di Afrodizia: Commentario al De caelo di Aristotele. Frammenti del primo libro* (Amsterdam, 2004). Further examples could be added.

³⁹ This is, again, a debated issue, but Plotinus' dependence on Alexander's reading of Aristotle can be seen as a well-established fact: see the *status quaestionis* in R. W. Sharples, 'Alexander of Aphrodisias: Scholasticism and Innovation', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.36.2 (Berlin and New York, 1987), 1176–1243 at 1220–4. Among more recent studies see e.g. K. Corrigan, *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias* (Leuven, 1996). More details in R. Chiaradonna, 'Hylémorphisme et causalité des intelligibles: Plotin et Alexandre d'Aphrodise', *Études philosophiques* (2008/3), 379–97.

not have been possible without Alexander) constitutes a major change from the previous Platonists. Of course, one might object to the present account that Plotinus' works have survived whereas those of the previous Platonists did not: this should recommend prudence in assessing his historical position; furthermore, Plotinus' familiarity with Aristotle may perhaps be regarded as a legacy of the (unwritten) teaching of Ammonius Sacca.⁴⁰ Such objections may not be answered conclusively, and prudence is obviously more than recommended in dealing with such controversial issues; however, it can hardly be denied that the extant evidence on Platonists before Plotinus, as well as that on Plotinus' posterity among the later commentators, strongly suggests that he marked a real turn in the Platonist reception of Aristotle.

Thus, the hypothesis according to which Plotinus' extensive knowledge of Aristotle was a distinctively new feature of his Platonism, and one that relied heavily on the work of Alexander of Aphrodisias, remains the more attractive one. What persisted in the later Neoplatonists was, however, not Plotinus' distinctive philosophical approach: his most original theories (such as the undescending soul, the conception of matter, the views on physical substance and the categories) are often polemically targeted by the later commentators. Despite recent attempts to argue for the opposite conclusion, the conventional opinion according to which Porphyry's harmonizing of Plato and Aristotle is not prepared at all by Plotinus, but rather marks a reaction *against* Plotinus' critical approach, appears basically correct.⁴¹ What remained of Plotinus' attitude towards Aristotle was, instead, the profound knowledge of the school treatises and the use of Aristotle (as well as of the pre-Plotinian Aristotle commentary tradition) at the core of Platonism. From Plotinus onwards, ancient philosophy is generally connected to the reading and interpretation of Plato's and Aristotle's works,

⁴⁰ See Photius' excerpts from Hierocles, which provide a summary of Ammonius' views on the agreement between Plato and Aristotle 'as regards the essential and most necessary doctrines' (*Bibl. cod.* 214, 172^a7–9=T. 12 Schwyzer; see also *cod.* 214, 173^a18–21=T. 13 Schwyzer; *cod.* 214, 173^a32–40=T. 14 Schwyzer; *cod.* 251, 461^a24–39=T. 15 Schwyzer). The assessment of Hierocles' report is, however, a debated issue: see the recent discussion in Karamanolis, *Agreement*, 191–215 (further discussion in Chiaradonna's review mentioned above, n. 31).

⁴¹ For a recent defence of the conventional interpretation see J. Barnes, "There was an old person from Tyre": Critical Notice of George Karamanolis and Anne Sheppard (eds.), *Studies on Porphyry*, *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Supplement 98, London, 2007, *Rhizai*, 5 (2008), 127–51 at 132–3.

to the extent that the reading of Aristotle's school treatises came to be part of the Neoplatonist curriculum.

Alexander of Aphrodisias' historical position is double: he *concludes* the first part of the ancient commentary tradition (that of the Aristotelian commentators from Andronicus onwards) and *prepares*, by his systematic reading, the reception of Aristotle's treatises within the Platonist tradition from Plotinus and Porphyry onwards. Indeed, Alexander's commentary work can be regarded as the *culmination* of the tradition that starts in the age of Andronicus; yet this opinion needs substantial qualification. In particular, it would be wrong to argue that the commentators before Alexander provide nothing but imperfect anticipations of his distinctive way of reading Aristotle: the opposite is rather the case, and what we know of the commentary tradition before Alexander suggests that he reacted against alternative readings of Aristotle developed by the previous Aristotelian exegetes (more on that below). As S. duly remarks, the works of the Aristotelian commentators before Alexander are almost completely lost: 'The earliest commentaries on Aristotle still extant are by members of the Aristotelian (or Peripatetic) school in the second century AD' ('Introduction', 6). S. quotes in the *Sourcebook* Aspasius' commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (see *Psychology*, 13(b)1; 17(b)2; 17(b)3; *Physics*, 21(a)9) and refers extensively to Alexander, but apart from occasional references,⁴² he neglects the earlier commentators, whose philosophical ideas have been the focus of a masterly survey in Paul Moraux's *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen*.⁴³ Though perhaps unavoidable,⁴⁴ this choice exacts a certain price. Admittedly, the earlier works are lost, but later commentators (especially Simplicius) report several fragments of and testimonia concerning the earlier tradition, which call for atten-

⁴² For example, Xenarchus' views on the composition of the heavens are expounded in detail at *Physics*, 23(a).

⁴³ See P. Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias*, vol. I [*Aristotelismus*, I] (Berlin and New York, 1973). See also H. B. Gottschalk, 'Aristotelian Philosophy in the Roman World from the Time of Cicero to the End of the Second Century AD', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II.36.2 (Berlin and New York, 1987), 1079–1174 (part of this paper was reprinted under the title 'The Earliest Aristotelian Commentators' in Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed*, 55–81).

⁴⁴ See below, at the end of this section. Possibly S. was deliberately reserving the earlier period of philosophy to the two-volume collection of essays which he went on to co-edit with Robert W. Sharples in 2007, on Greek and Roman philosophy from 100 BC to AD 200 (see above, n. 32).

tion. While S.'s choice of systematically integrating Plotinus in the *Sourcebook* proves to be illuminating for understanding the background ideas of the Neoplatonist commentators, his (possibly deliberate) neglect of the earlier commentators has the unwelcome consequence of concealing the origins of several debates that significantly shaped late antique philosophy. Again, the discussion of one example will help to clarify this issue.

Chapter 3 in *Logic and Metaphysics* is devoted to 'Categories'. Section 3(a) includes a long and famous text from Simplicius' commentary on the *Categories* (1. 8–3. 17 Kalbfleisch), which provides an overview of the previous exegetical works on the treatise;⁴⁵ the text is preceded by a substantial (and excellent) presentation, where S. synthetically outlines the history of the reception of the *Categories* from the early commentators in the first century BC to Simplicius. In this way, section 3(a) provides an extremely clear and incisive prelude to the whole of part 3, which focuses on the most important issues of the ancient commentary tradition on the *Categories* (the subject-matter of the treatise, the reasons for Aristotle's list of categories, Plotinus' attacks and the replies by the later commentators, etc.). While Plotinus has a prominent position in the discussion (which is hardly surprising), the early commentators are not brought into focus. Yet, as S. himself notes in the presentation of 3(a), the early commentaries from that of Andronicus had focused above all on the *Categories*, and this treatise had a tremendous impact on the early debates on Aristotle (the *Categories* were actually read and interpreted not only by Aristotelian philosophers, but also by Platonists and Stoics).⁴⁶ It has recently been argued that the early interest in the *Categories* around the first century BC was somehow connected to the Hellenistic philosophical background of the period; this is an extremely interesting hypothesis, one that needs further scrutiny.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, it is

⁴⁵ This text has been the focus of much interest: see I. Hadot, 'Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 1,3–3,17 Kalbfleisch'. ⁴⁶ See *Logic and Metaphysics*, 56.

⁴⁷ See R. W. Sharples, "'Habent sua fata libelli': Aristotle's *Categories* in the First Century BC", *Acta Antiqua Hungarica*, 48 (2008), 273–87. According to Sharples, the *Categories* aroused interest because it did not easily fit into the standard Hellenistic divisions of philosophy and their usual agendas; more than Aristotle's other works, the *Categories* revealed aspects of Aristotle's thought that had become unfamiliar during the Hellenistic period. Such a hypothesis is ingenious, but deserves further scrutiny and is open to some objections. First, there are obvious 'material' reasons which may explain the success of Aristotle's *Categories*: the treatise is short and relatively easy to handle; it was much simpler to engage in a detailed commen-

worth noting that the views of commentators such as Andronicus of Rhodes and Boethus of Sidon sound peculiar to those who are familiar with the philosophy of their later ‘colleagues’: for example, the theory of the essential form, which has a pivotal position in the late antique reception of Aristotle, is strikingly neglected by the early commentators, whose reading of Aristotle is, instead, ‘centred on the *Categories*’.⁴⁸ It is, then, extremely important to distinguish their overall approach from that of the later commentators from Alexander of Aphrodisias onwards, and it may safely be assumed that Alexander developed some of his distinctive interpretations as a criticism of earlier exegetes.⁴⁹

Section 3(y) presents a selection of texts which focus on the problem ‘Is form substance or an accident of matter?’. As always, S. outlines clearly the issue at stake: ‘Outside the *Categories*, Aristotle treats form as the most serious candidate for the honorific title of substance. One might therefore not expect it to be treated as an accident. And Alexander (?) emphasizes that form is not related to matter in the way that an accident is present in a substance’ (*Logic and Metaphysics*, 122). Texts 3(y)1–3 (Alex. Aphr. *Mant.* 119. 31–120. 17 Bruns; *Quaest.* 1. 17, 29. 31–30. 22 Bruns; *Quaest.* 1. 8, 17. 30–18. 4 Bruns) contain a substantial set of arguments by Alexander whose aim is to demonstrate that the relation of the form to the matter is different from the *en hypokeimenōi einai* relation which, according to *Cat.* 2, 1^a24–5, connects accidents to their substantial subject. Significantly, arguments such as those developed in Alexander are reported by Simplicius, who attributes them to Porphyry’s lost great commentary *Ad Gedaliūm* (see *Simpl. In Cat.* 78. 21–31 Kalbfleisch=3(y)5=Porph. 58F Smith). There is, however, a crucial fact that does not emerge in S.’s presentation: if Alex-

tary on it than, say, to prepare a commentary on the central books of the *Metaphysics*. Secondly, it may perhaps be argued, *contra* Sharples, that the *Categories* aroused interest just because it provided a synthetic non-Stoic treatment of doctrines and notions which were *well known* to philosophers versed in Stoic philosophy, such as the theory of predication and the notions of *οὐσία*, ‘quality’, ‘relative’, ‘relatively disposed’, etc. Commenting on the *Categories* was, then, an extremely straightforward way to present a united front against the Stoics.

⁴⁸ M. Rashed, *Essentialisme: Alexandre d’Aphrodise entre logique, physique et cosmologie [Essentialisme]* (Berlin and New York, 2007), 42; see also id., ‘Priorité de l’*εἶδος* ou du *γένος* entre Andronicos et Alexandre: vestiges arabes et grecs inédits’, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 14 (2004), 9–63.

⁴⁹ This overall interpretation is developed by M. Rashed in the studies mentioned in the immediately preceding note.

ander and his followers spend so much effort demonstrating that form is not an accident of matter, the reason is that someone before them had held the precise view that they reject and treated Aristotle's substantial form as an accident of matter. Porphyry's argument quoted by S. is actually presented by Simplicius as a response to Boethus of Sidon, whose views on substance Simplicius paraphrases in detail (*In Cat.* 78. 4–20 Kalbfleisch). Apparently, Boethus ascribed a privileged status to the criteria of substantiality set forth in the *Categories* (most notably, the fact of 'not being in a subject'), so that he did not refrain from regarding Aristotle's essential form (which, as he notes, Aristotle treats 'elsewhere', ἐν ἄλλοις: Simpl. *In Cat.* 78. 7 Kalbfleisch) as falling *outside* substance (i.e. in non-substantial categories), since it is 'in something else' (ἐν ἄλλῳ, 78. 14 Kalbfleisch), i.e. in matter. Boethus' arguments deserve a close scrutiny, which is not possible here,⁵⁰ but at least one conclusion may plausibly be drawn, namely that Alexander's insistence on the fact that substantial form 'is not in a subject' was closely connected to the discussion of Boethus' interpretation (Porphyry probably paraphrased Alexander's objections and Simplicius quoted Porphyry, either directly or via Iamblichus). The theory of substantial *eidos* is arguably the most distinctive aspect of Alexander's 'essentialist' reading of Aristotle, and its impact on the later tradition was immense.⁵¹ But it is extremely important to remark that Alexander's reading was not created *in vitro*; rather, it came from the discussion of previous interpretations which developed a different overall approach to Aristotle.

This is but one example; a systematic overview of Andronicus' and Boethus' ideas (but also of those of Eudorus or the pseudo-Pythagorean treatises on categories) could arguably enrich significantly not only the chapter on categories but also that on universals (which provides, however, a masterly treatment of the topic from Plato to the late commentators and is certainly one of the best parts of the *Sourcebook*).⁵² The complex and inevitably speculative de-

⁵⁰ More details in T. Reinhardt, 'Andronicus of Rhodes and Boethus of Sidon on Aristotle's *Categories*', in Sharples and Sorabji (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, 513–29 at 523–5. Moraux's survey of Boethus in *Aristotelismus*, i. 143–79, is still unsurpassed.

⁵¹ See again Rashed, *Essentialisme*.

⁵² S.'s omission of the earlier period was certainly remedied when the collection of papers edited with R. W. Sharples appeared: see Sharples and Sorabji (eds.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ii. 687–97, index s.nn. 'Boethus', 'Andronicus', 'Eudorus', 'Lucius', 'Nicostratus'. A further attempt to fill the relevant part of the gap has now

tective work required on many fragments of the earlier commentators may explain, and will be thought by some to justify, S.'s belief that the earlier period could not be fitted into the format of his *Sourcebook*. But still one may wish that more had been possible on this issue.

3. The *Sourcebook* and Islamic philosophy

S. is well aware of the important role the *Sourcebook* will play in our future understanding of the transmission of Greek philosophy to the medieval world, both in Arabic and in Latin.⁵³ At a certain level of generality, this point can hardly be denied. Be it through the Arabs or the Latin authors of late antiquity, Augustine and Boethius in particular, the Middle Ages were very well informed about the concepts and methods of the commentators. It will thus be tempting, now that we have such a huge volume of potential 'sources' translated into English and carefully explained, to write the history of philosophy, up to Leibniz at least, in a continuous fashion. And it will be all the more tempting to see in the Arabic discussions—which stand chronologically so close to the late Alexandrian school—something like a piece of Greek commentarism in Islamic disguise. Hence a word of warning for those inclined to pursue this path, which has long been tempting and might well be even more attractive now that S.'s *Sourcebook* makes the philosophy of the late antique commentators so much more accessible.

Let us begin by noting a major difference between the Greek and the Arabic age. S. insists, in his 'Introduction' (19–24), on the complexity of the relationship, in late antiquity, between pagan philosophy and patristic thought. For even if the two sides were often sometimes engaged in fierce polemics, it is none the less undeniable that some convergences are striking—the affirmation, in particular, of a Demiurgic causality of the world.⁵⁴ But this common point makes the difference even more striking. For there is prob-

been made by M. Griffin, 'The Reception of Aristotle's *Categories*, c.80 BC to AD 220' (diss. Oxford 2009).

⁵³ See 'Introduction', 5: 'The book is intended to help specialists in other related fields: Islamicists, Latinists, theologians, historians of science, scholars of other types of commentary or of commentary on other languages, and Medieval or Renaissance scholars, to name but a few.'

⁵⁴ On the role played by Ammonius in this issue see K. Verrycken, 'The Meta-

ably no Christian thinker, during the whole of antiquity, who would have considered himself as a ‘philosopher’.⁵⁵ The likely explanation for this is that the great majority of the pagan philosophers upheld three major theses which contradicted Christian dogma: they were ready to accept a plurality of divine entities; they did not believe in the Christian Resurrection; and they thought that the world had existed for ever in the past. We must be alive to the fact that these three claims are not mere ‘philosophical’ theses, but also important elements of a general ideological framework, which is, at least in part, constitutive of the identity of the ‘philosophers’. This fact is reflected by the organization of the *Sourcebook*. Although the period taken into consideration (AD 200–600) can be viewed as the golden age of Greek and Latin patristics, there is practically no text, in its three thick volumes, which could have been written by a Christian author of the *Patrologia Graeca*. It is of course an open question whether the philosophy of Aristotle’s commentators is *the*, or only *a*, philosophy of their age. But we cannot deny that from an external point of view at least, there was a nearly perfect overlap of religious and professional identities: Greek ‘philosophers’, i.e. people defining themselves as *philosophoi*, were all pagans.⁵⁶

In contrast to this situation, some significant Muslim thinkers identified themselves as ‘philosophers’ (*falāsifa*), originating thereby a major turn in the history of philosophy.⁵⁷ We must

physics of Ammonius Son of Hermeias’, in Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed*, 199–221.

⁵⁵ On this question see A. J. Festugière, *L’Idéal religieux des grecs et l’Évangile* (Paris, 1932), in his interesting ‘excursus C’, entitled ‘Aristote dans la littérature grecque chrétienne jusqu’à Théodoret’ (221–63).

⁵⁶ For Olympiodorus, *φιλόσοφος* still signifies ‘pagan thinker’ (cf. L. G. Westerink, ‘The Alexandrian Commentators’, in Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed*, 325–48 at 336: ‘to those classes of society which used to provide the students for the philosophical schools the word philosopher must have meant what Olympiodorus implies it does, a pagan philosopher. Even the Christians who continued the work of Olympiodorus did little to change this essentially pagan outlook.’ Philoponus after his Christian turn is not likely to have called himself a *φιλόσοφος*. The nickname ‘the Grammarian’ is neither a mark of contempt coined by Simplicius nor a mere allusion to Philoponus’ professional status in Alexandria. If Elias and David are sometimes called *φιλόσοφος*, this meant only that they were *professors of philosophy* at the university (cf. Westerink, loc. cit.). This makes the case of the *Christian philosopher* Boethius, in the Latin West, even more interesting.

⁵⁷ The first clear example we have of this appellation appears with al-Kindī, nicknamed, as is well known, ‘the Philosopher of the Arabs’, who clearly saw himself as a ‘philosopher’. His major treatise in this field, now only partially preserved, was probably called *On First Philosophy*.

be alive to what would be a paradox from the point of view of Greek attitudes: the fact that philosophy became a possible occupation for Abrahamic minds. That does not amount to saying, of course, that its 'naturalization' in a Muslim society was entirely smooth and peaceful. But the danger to it came not so much from the political side as from its professionalization, i.e. its transformation into one intellectual discipline among others, which had to find its place between rational theology on the one hand and the mathematical sciences on the other.⁵⁸

These important transformations explain why, despite S.'s obvious lack of interest in Neoplatonism as the Sufi ideology that, in many of its aspects, it undoubtedly *was*, his *Sourcebook* is actually more historical than so many papers and books recently written on late ancient philosophy. We have already alluded to this fact, *a parte ante* as it were, in emphasizing S.'s recognition of Plotinus' decisive influence on the commentators' interpretation of Aristotle.⁵⁹ But that is true *a parte post* as well, i.e. with respect to what Islamic philosophers selected, three or four centuries later, from the huge corpus of the Greek commentators. It would in fact be easy to show that the organization of the *Sourcebook* is very close to that of the four most influential parts of Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Shifā'*, which notoriously gave its physiognomy to pre-modern philosophy: book 1 maps the *Book of the Soul*, book 2 the *Physics*, and book 3 combines some chapters of the *Logic* with the book of the *Metaphysics*. Some correspondences are so striking that the reader sometimes wonders whether S., following a regressive path from the manifest effects to their hidden causes, might not have composed his three volumes with the structure of the Avicennian *summa* in mind.

Avicenna would have been less surprised, indeed, than many moderns by the organization of the *Sourcebook*. From a historiographical point of view, this statement is not without interest. To say that Greek philosophy in Arabic is mostly of Aristotelian inspiration is not very illuminating in this regard, since in some of its parts at least, its concepts and methods are deeply influenced by Neoplatonic discussions rather than by Aristotle or even Alexander. The

⁵⁸ Our understanding of these two domains has been greatly improved, in the last decades, by the works of J. van Ess and R. Rashed. See in particular J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols. (Berlin and New York, 1991–7), and R. Rashed, *Les Mathématiques infinitésimales du IX^e au XI^e siècle*, 5 vols. (London, 1993–2006).

⁵⁹ See above, pp. 256–7 and 266 in particular.

main difference seems rather to lie in the fact that many of the Islamic Aristotelians—al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Avempace, Averroes—derive from the commentators many of the problems they address, but not the general ideology in which they are often embedded. For they generally reject Porphyry’s (anti-Christian) agenda of harmonizing Plato and Aristotle. Their rejection appears clearly in Avicenna and Averroes, who attack at length every kind of reference to Platonic Forms in their metaphysical texts. But it is no less evident in the case of al-Fārābī once we realize that the book *On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages, the Divine Plato and Aristotle* was not written by him but, very likely, by a Baghdadi philosopher of the next generation.⁶⁰ To cut a long story short, some (but not all) Islamic philosophers departed from their Greek counterparts in being, in a manner not dissimilar to that of S. in his *Sourcebook*, more alive to the possibility of resolving Aristotelian problems with the help of the commentators—albeit in non-Aristotelian ways—than to that of building along their lines an ideological construction aimed at showing the basic agreement of Plato and Aristotle.

We may start by noting an unresolved tension between chapters 1 (‘Nature’) and 3 (‘Divine Knowledge and Power’) of volume ii (*Physics*) of the *Sourcebook*. The second of these themes can hardly be considered to be genuinely Aristotelian, nor even Platonic. It appears and develops slowly in Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, and treatment of its complex evolution would need a book of its own.⁶¹ S.’s selection of texts illustrates very well that the turning-point, on this issue, occurs between Plotinus and Iamblichus. For despite some important differences on this theme as well as on others, Plotinus agrees with Alexander in limiting divine knowledge of the world, while Iamblichus introduces a principle, that knowledge takes its character from the knower, not the known,

⁶⁰ See J. Lameer, *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics: Greek Theory and Islamic Practice* (Leiden and New York, 1994), 30–9, and M. Rashed, ‘On the Authorship of the Treatise *On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages* Attributed to al-Fārābī [‘Authorship’], *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 19 (2009), 43–82.

⁶¹ For the Hellenistic and Roman debate see M. Mignucci, ‘Logic and Omniscience: Alexander of Aphrodisias and Proclus’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 3 (1985), 219–46. For the question of God’s knowledge of the terms of life see W. Lackner (ed., trans., comm.), *Nikephoros Blemmydes: Gegen die Vorherbestimmung der Todesstunde* (Athens and Leiden, 1985), xliiii–lxxxiv, and C. Garton and L. G. Westerink (ed. and trans.), *Germanos: On Predestined Terms of Life* (New York, 1979), introduction.

which will be the core of the philosophers' defence of the claim that the gods are omniscient. The school of Athens, in particular, is unanimous, as S. shows, in adopting this doctrine. No Greek thinker after Iamblichus seems to favour Alexander's solution. But from a certain point of view Iamblichus' solution is no solution at all, because it defines God's knowledge in a purely negative way. To state, with Proclus, that 'the gods themselves know what is generated without generation, and what is extended without extension, and what is divided without division, and what is in time eternally, and what is contingent necessarily'⁶² amounts to no more than saying that the gods know the sublunar, but that *we* do not know how they know it. The real challenge, for Proclus' readers such as Avicenna, will be to explain what it really means to know the particulars in a universal way, i.e. to account in human terms for the possibility of knowing an infinite series of items. Some philosophers will deem this project impossible and blame either the infinity of time or the particular knowledge of God; others will focus on the question of the infinite and explain how some degree of actual infinity is tolerable. The typical structure of the *Sourcebook's* chapters—first Alexander's position, then the Neoplatonic commentators' elaboration of it according to their own philosophical principles—allows us in turn to explain what remained until now unclear in the study of Arabic philosophy: the fact that the Arabic philosophers start from the late commentators' position but develop intuitions more akin to Alexander's stance. To anticipate our conclusion: the Neoplatonic commentators mentioned by S. are on almost every topic the authors read by the Islamic thinkers themselves. For that reason it will be impossible to dwell with the latter without taking into account what is said in the *Sourcebook*. But the Islamic thinkers never adopt Neoplatonic solutions in their entirety, for these solutions reflect an agenda which was not their own.

Be this as it may, the peaceful coexistence of these two chapters (*Physics*, chs. 1 and 3) in the *Sourcebook* conceals what was a crucial dilemma for the later tradition. Either we opt, with Alexander, for an Aristotelian doctrine so that the question of divine knowledge and power must be explained away as an illusion of theologians, or we choose a 'Demiurgic' explanatory scheme so that this time it is nature that will run the risk of becoming secondary, a mere name

⁶² *In Tim.* 2, i. 352. 5 ff. Diehl. Cf. *Physics*, 73.

for God's habits.⁶³ We would like to show that these two chapters become the two horns of the most wide-ranging dilemma of the pre-modern age, so that they come to reflect as well as shape the evolution of the discipline. To illustrate this claim in some detail, we shall address three examples, drawn from the three main domains covered by the *Sourcebook*.

(a) *Theory of action and causality*

Chapter 14 of *Psychology* examines the commentators' 'theory of action'. We may note, first of all, that this chapter is distinct from that dedicated to divine power. The question of determinism appears here in an exclusively ethical and physical context. The *Sourcebook* shows that the Greek discussion takes place between two main poles: the compatibilism of the Stoics on the one hand, and on the other the efforts by Alexander to develop, by elaborating on Aristotle's theory of deliberation, an intellectualist solution to the problem that preserves human freedom.⁶⁴ Alexander, in his treatise *On Providence* in particular, tries to preserve on the one hand the Stoic rule that nothing happens without a cause and that the same cause leads to the same effect, and on the other the fact that our actions are not predetermined by the state of the world at the instant when we accomplish them. S. also shows how this conflict between Alexander and the Stoics reappears, in very similar terms, between Proclus and Plotinus. Whereas Proclus argues in favour of the freedom of our choices and volitions, Plotinus inclines towards some sort of compatibilism. One might discuss the various ways of construing determinism that were developed by the Hellenistic philosophers, in particular by distinguishing between the ethical, the biological/physical, and the cosmological side of the question. No doctrine, however, not even among those which stood closest

⁶³ Since we interpret the creation myth of the *Timaeus* literally, we tend to see this opposition as one between Aristotle and Plato. But other interpretations—and, in particular, the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato according to which the temporal creation of the *Timaeus* must not be taken at its face value—are theoretically possible. In this case, there is obviously no opposition between the action of a Demiurge and the eternity of the world. To mention only Proclus, he certainly held that divine power sustains things in existence *for all eternity*.

⁶⁴ See *Psychology*, 310: 'Alexander is more rationalist than the rationalist Stoics, and much more rationalist than Aristotle.' The most recent survey of the question, with a discussion of the seminal studies of S. Bobzien, is R. W. Sharples, 'L'accident du déterminisme: Alexandre d'Aphrodise dans son contexte historique', *Études philosophiques* (2008/3), 285–303.

to fatalism, seems to have interpreted human action as *produced* by some transcendent principle. One could at most say that every human act is always determined by the general state of the world. But this determination did not preclude the idea of a *reaction* of some sort, of some decision being *taken*. To say, after all, that Socrates' action is determined by the events having taken place in the prime of his youth has never prevented our considering him, if not responsible for his acts, as at least their agent. It would be a different, and much more extreme, assumption to say that it is those past events, rather than the present Socrates, that are the real agent of what we normally take to be his actions.

At first glance, one might think that the rich debate in the Islamic sphere on the issue of responsibility and human action was nothing but the historical sequel of the Greek disputes. Roughly speaking, Islamic thinkers would have radicalized the problem and transferred its basic premisses from the physical to the theological sphere. But the situation is likely to have been different. The question of determinism in Islam is originally part and parcel of an ideological quest for political legitimacy.⁶⁵ The Muslims, as is well known, were from their very beginning divided into numerous sects and dynasties, out of which only one had positioned itself at the head of the new empire. In a theological context marked by the dogma of divine omnipotence, this situation inevitably gave rise to new questions, bearing upon the question of the sense of world history, the relationship between God and the community of his creatures, and, ultimately, the individual actions of these creatures.⁶⁶ As to the political, or dynastic, aspect of the question, it goes without saying that the group leading the State showed a neat tendency to favour a very strong determinism, whereas some of its opponents allowed for a relative autonomy of the political sphere and, *a fortiori*, of human actions. It was this situation which created and stimulated the debate, as early as the first century after the Prophet's death (c. AD 650–750), a period when more or less nothing of the Greek philosophical heritage was yet known to the Muslims.

This new Muslim framework for the discussion of determinism,

⁶⁵ For a very good introduction see W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1985), 1–25. See also J. van Ess, *Zwischen Hadīṭ und Theologie: Studien zum Entstehen prädestinatianischer Überlieferung* (Berlin and New York, 1975), 68–71.

⁶⁶ On this see D. Gimaret, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane* (Paris, 1980).

with its new political and theological flavour, brings about certain questions which had not really been tackled in the Hellenistic world, and which were to play a decisive role in the subsequent history of philosophy. S. shows how some Greek Platonists constructed an intermediary position, according to which necessity, in the domain of human affairs, is only *ex hypothesi*, viz. applies solely to the (inevitable) consequences of the (real) choices that we make.⁶⁷ S. does not emphasize the retrospective interest of this thesis, which indeed prefigures the intermediary position, between the ‘science of vision’ (*scientia visionis*) and the ‘science of simple intelligence’ (*scientia simplicis intelligentiae*), of the ‘middle science’ (*scientia media*) of pre-modern and modern thinkers—the sole (but crucial) difference being the fact that the question is not, in the ancient sources, that of God’s knowledge, but rather that of what may be known, by him as well as by us. We see here very clearly the boundary between Greek and pre-modern speculations (that is not a value judgement, of course, but a simple fact): although the three issues of divine omniscience, fate, and human responsibility are identified and discussed at great length, Greek thinkers never seriously ask themselves to what extent we may consider *everything* in the world, including ourselves, as the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle in the hand of a divine principle; to what extent, in particular, it is God who acts when ‘I’ think I do.

Does all this amount to saying that the Greek debates on the determination of our actions remained unknown to Muslim thinkers? That would be demonstrably false, and it is at this point that the issue becomes, from an epistemological point of view, very interesting. For it is the internal evolution of the Islamic debate, which was already more than two centuries old, that led the scholars, at a certain time, to take into account the Greek discussions.⁶⁸ Even if the Greek discussions were often more refined and, at any rate, conducted from a different perspective, nevertheless the Islamic

⁶⁷ See *Psychology*, 313.

⁶⁸ We may be reluctant, in other words, to interpret the translation movement of 9th-cent. Baghdad as mainly dictated by an ideological agenda of the Abbassid rulers, as, for example, D. Gutas does (see his *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāssid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)* (London and New York, 1998)). There was surely an internal development of certain questions, which at a certain time, independently from any political consideration, was such as to make it possible and fruitful to translate the masterpieces of Greek learning.

perspective was at this stage sufficiently rooted in the intellectual landscape to produce a cross-pollination of the two traditions. Consequently we find, on the side of the ‘philhellenic’ philosophers (the *falāsifa*), a clear tendency to emphasize, in a way that reminds us of the great systems of the seventeenth century, the theological aspects of a ‘general’ determinism inherited from the Neoplatonic tradition; they agreed, in other words, to interpret the hierarchy of being in the form assumed by the Athenian tradition in terms of God realizing his decree by exercising his power over every portion of the world. We must, however, stress the fact that several options remained open: the cosmology ‘through which’ the best possible world is realized is sometimes understood to be that of Alexander’s neo-Aristotelianism, sometimes as more akin to Plato’s *Timaeus* interpreted literally. These two pairs of criteria entail complex interactions, which should not be reduced to a flat opposition between ‘philosophers’ and ‘theologians’. The basic divisions are represented in Table 1. Although it is true that the two main sects of Muslim theologians are grouped together in the left column—it would be difficult indeed to be a theologian without accepting the idea of the world being the result of a divine act of creation according to a motive—we note that the basic opposition between a full and a mitigated determinism divides the philosophers also. Moreover, some philosophers—namely al-Kindī and different traditions stemming from him⁶⁹—agree with the theologians in recognizing the existence of a divine choice. A special word must be said, in this context, about Avicenna, whose position is actually more complex than suggested by Table 1, and often gives the impression of standing midway between al-Kindī and al-Fārābī.⁷⁰ For despite

⁶⁹ See Rashed, ‘Authorship’, 64–6.

⁷⁰ My way of opposing al-Fārābī and Avicenna may startle the reader. But three arguments show the difference between their respective stances. (i) In the texts where they deal with the future contingents, al-Fārābī (followed by Averroes) is eager to argue against full (theological) determinism, while Avicenna does his best to confine the discussion to the neutral realm of logic (compare al-Fārābī, *Commentary on Aristotle’s De interpretatione*, 89. 12–100. 25 Kutsch–Marrow (Beirut, 1986) (trans. in F. W. Zimmermann, *Al-Fārābī’s Commentary and Short Treatise on Aristotle’s De interpretatione* (Cambridge, 1991), 83–96) with Avicenna, *De interpretatione of the Shifa’*, 70. 10–72. 8 al-Khudayri (Cairo, 1970)). (ii) Whereas al-Fārābī is the author of many works on political philosophy, in which he argues for the existence of the ‘voluntary intelligible’, which would be self-contradictory in a determinist context (cf. H. Zghal, ‘Métaphysique et science politique: les intelligibles volontaires dans le *Tahṣīl al-sa’āda* d’al-Fārābī’, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 8 (1998), 169–94), Avicenna does not show the slightest interest in political

TABLE I. *God and the world according to some Islamic thinkers*

	Divine creation has a motive; the world is not eternal <i>a parte ante</i> (the <i>Timaeus</i> 's model)	Divine creation has no motive; the world is eternal <i>a parte ante</i> (the Aristotelian model)
Full determinism	Ash'arites	Avicenna
Mitigated determinism	Mu'tazilites, al-Kindī, Ibn 'Adī	Al-Fārābī, Averroes

the fact that he is a convinced emanationist, a believer in emanation as the causal mechanism in the universe, Avicenna sometimes expresses his position in terms of divine decree and choice. But I think that the rationale behind this is simply that Avicenna wants us to understand that what we may call divine 'choice' is in fact nothing but the emanation of the best possible world out of the First Principle and the divine intellects; it is not dictated by an external 'motive' or 'cause'.⁷¹ This new distribution of the different solutions to the question of freedom and determinism taking place in the Islamic world allows us to explain, from a historical point of view, the evolution of the question from the age of the commentators up to pre-modern and modern philosophy.⁷²

(b) *Theory of motion and continuous creation*

Chapters 9–11 of volume ii (*Physics*) deal with the infinite and divisibility. S. is of course perfectly aware of all the intricacies of these questions, to which he has already dedicated two important books.⁷³ That allows him to perceive in all their shades the different claims made on such issues by the commentators and, above all, their complex position with respect to their classical sources.

philosophy, and the concept of the 'voluntary intelligible' is wholly absent from his corpus. (iii) Avicenna wrote a considerable number of monographs in favour of the total determination of the world by God; there is no trace of such a concern in al-Fārābī's preserved corpus nor in the ancient lists of his writings.

⁷¹ In the *Ta'liqāt*, 53 Badawī (Cairo, 1973), Avicenna writes that 'to speak of chosen actions, in reality, makes sense only in the case of the First. . . . According to the Mu'tazilites, the (divine) choice takes place by reason of some motive or cause. But to choose by reason of a motive is a constraint. Hence, the Creator's choice and his action do not take place by reason of a motive.'

⁷² For Avicenna's theodicy see S. C. Inati, *The Problem of Evil: Ibn Sînâ's Theodicy* (Binghamton, NY, 2000).

⁷³ See *Time, Creation*, and R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion: Theories in Antiquity and their Sequels* (London, 1988).

It would be impossible, of course, to summarize the whole debate here. It seems clear, at least, that there were in antiquity two major types of physical theory, one favouring the continuum, which has an easy game in holding the perfect homogeneity of space, time, and motion (between each other and each one in itself), but must come to grips with the problem of the infinite; the other favouring atomism, which remains on the firm ground of finitism but is obliged to view space, motion, and also probably time, which we tend at first sight to consider as perfectly undifferentiated, as divided by arbitrary thresholds. All this is well known for the classical period, and rightly seen as constitutive of the debate between Aristotle and Democritus, as well as between Stoic and Epicurean physics. It would have been a likely guess that the commentators would all endorse Aristotle's theory of the continuum, since they accepted many of the claims made in the *Physics* about the sensible. But no! Things are more subtle, as S. shows, drawing our attention to three un-Aristotelian claims of great interest: (i) the theory of the *minima naturalia*, which, in spite of some vague antecedents in Aristotle's *Physics* (in his reply to Anaxagoras), is clearly more akin to corpuscularism than Aristotle was ready to accept;⁷⁴ (ii) the admission by Proclus of a certain geometrizing atomism inspired by the *Timaeus*;⁷⁵ and, last but not least, (iii) Damascius' original doctrine of kinetic and temporal leaps taking place in the sensible world.⁷⁶ These three aspects clearly demonstrate how, without entirely renouncing the Aristotelian continuum, the tradition of the commentators tried to bypass some of the difficulties raised by its infinitesimal structure by resorting to different kinds of corpuscularism.

In this case as in the first (human action), it would have seemed natural to interpret the Islamic thinkers' discussions as having simply been 'influenced' by the tradition of the Greek commentators. But we face a similar paradox. Rather early in the Islamic

⁷⁴ On this question in the Middle Ages see in particular B. Pabst, *Atomtheorien des lateinischen Mittelalters* (Darmstadt, 1994), 272 ff., with further bibliography. For Averroes see R. Glasner, 'Ibn Rushd's theory of *Minima Naturalia*', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 11 (2001), 9–26.

⁷⁵ On this text see C. Steel, 'Proclus' Defence of the *Timaeus* against Aristotle's Objections: A Reconstruction of a Lost Polemical Treatise', in T. Leinkauf and C. Steel (eds.), *Platons Timaios als Grundtext der Kosmologie in Spätantike, Mittelalter und Renaissance/Plato's Timaeus and the Foundations of Cosmology in Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Leuven, 2005), 163–93.

⁷⁶ See Sorabji, *Time, Creation*, 52–63.

period—even if perhaps slightly later than the debate on human actions—rational theologians developed a coherent atomic system whose signification was paradoxically very different from that of the Greeks who were eventually treated as their ‘sources’. It is well known that for the Church Fathers Epicurus’ atomism constituted the physics of atheism. Muslim theologians, a few centuries later, took an opposite view: corpuscularism is viewed as the physical doctrine which most closely espouses divine omniscience and omnipotence. For if, as the Koran says, ‘God has listed everything in number’ (cf. 72. 28), and the infinite is precisely what escapes number, there is a real danger in adopting, in the sensible realm, a doctrine upholding the existence of the continuum. Rational theologians thus analysed the world as a collection of atoms, which are nothing other than the ‘inhering places’ for the various accidents which God attributes to them. God is thus responsible for the ‘natures’ of things as well as for their interactions.

Thus the atomism of the theologians really is an atomism of and by theologians. This fundamental difference with respect to Greek discussions explains, here again, the fact that many new questions were raised which will arise later in European philosophy. The major debate was probably that between two theologians of the first half of the ninth century, Abū al-Hudhayl and al-Nazzām, on the possibility of motion.⁷⁷ Abū al-Hudhayl holds a thesis very similar to that of Aristotle’s adversaries in the *Physics*: some indivisible corpuscles of matter, moved by some indivisible sequences of motion, go through indivisible segments of space. At this stage, two interpretations are possible. The first one, which we may label *weak*, does not try to elucidate the dynamic foundation of such a sequential motion, i.e. the force which allows for the effective possibility of the trajectory between any two given points; the other, stronger interpretation sees in God the true efficient cause of this motion. Here again, we can distinguish between a weak and a strong interpretation. The former attributes to God a certain action on the (already) given body; the latter holds that God *re-creates* the body, at each stage of its trajectory, at some different place. In both cases the unity of motion is weaker than in Aristotle; but in the second it becomes a mere cinematographic illusion, produced by the juxtaposition, at temporal and spatial intervals very near to one

⁷⁷ On this topic see A. Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalam: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Muʿtazili Cosmology* (Leiden and New York, 1994).

another, of numerically different bodies having indiscernible constitutions. To both ‘weak’ sequential models, which have in common the claim that the same body successively occupies adjacent positions, al-Nazzām objects that their determination of the ‘very small’ size of the atoms and, similarly, of the atoms of motion is arbitrary. In other words, al-Nazzām sides with Aristotle in rejecting any absolute limit of ‘smallness’, and with Abū al-Hudhayl in claiming that a motion through an infinite number of positions is impossible—or, what amounts to the same thing, that Aristotle’s distinction between actuality and potentiality makes things no better on this issue. Consequently, only one avenue remains open to al-Nazzām, his famous theory of the ‘leaps’: God re-creates the body at different positions on its trajectory.

In one of his previous studies S. argued for a connection between Damascius’ and al-Nazzām’s leaps.⁷⁸ Although some similarities are undeniable and even striking, the hypothesis of a direct dependence is questionable. Al-Nazzām’s doctrine seems better explained in the context of the theologians’ polemics, where it has its roots, and in particular with respect to the confrontation with Abū al-Hudhayl’s ‘sequentialism’. Damascius, moreover, seems to have remained unknown to the Arabic tradition. And above all, important differences between both theories must be taken into account. Damascius’ ‘leap’ stands halfway between the atomism refuted in the *Physics* and the idea of a continuous creation. With the former, it has in common a commitment to the existence of microscopic thresholds; with the latter, it attributes these thresholds to the influence of some Demiurgic principle.⁷⁹ But Damascius, like all his Greek predecessors (see S.E. *PH* 76–8), does not consider that the moved body is re-created at different positions on its trajectory which are separated from one another by a given length. He just postulates a sequential motion each parcel of which is both extended and indivisible, in a time which is both extended and indivisible. As aptly remarked by S. (*Physics*, 206), this last point is probably Damascius’ main original contribution. And whereas Damascius seems to see in his sequential time something like the ‘pulsation’ of the sensible world, he does seem to question the fact that the different positions of the moved body, on its trajectory, are adjacent to one another.⁸⁰ His ‘topology’, in other words, is identical

⁷⁸ See *Time, Creation*, 384–6.

⁷⁹ See S., *Physics*, 207.

⁸⁰ It would thus be an anticipation of an important element of doctrine in

to that of Aristotle's opponents and, more generally, to that of the various atomists, Abū al-Hudhayl included. Al-Nazzām went a step further: in the terminology of the *Physics*, the two positions of the moved body are no longer adjacent but only successive, i.e. such that no third 'creation' of the body occurs between them.

It is plain, thus, that al-Nazzām's claims cannot be understood if abstracted from the theological considerations about divine omniscience and omnipotence of which they are part and parcel. They do not 'respond' to Greek ideas on the continuum, for it is rather that the commentators on Aristotle's *Physics* were translated into Arabic, at about the time of Abū al-Hudhayl and al-Nazzām, in order to clarify the various issues pertaining to the problem of the continuum. The chief role assigned to Greek physics—by Aristotle himself, of course, and by Alexander and Philoponus—was to furnish the main tenets of a coherent theory of the continuum (space, time, and motion). The question was broadly recognized as crucial, for it appeared very soon that a clear grasp of its main tenets was a prerequisite for any discussion of divine efficiency and/or creation. Against al-Kindī, for example, who in numerous writings defended the notion of an instantaneous creation, al-Fārābī seems to have relied on Aristotle's proofs in *Physics* 6 to show that such a notion was self-contradictory.⁸¹ Typically, what we see here is a new reading of the Greek sources oriented by Islamic theological discussions. And here again, the debate between philosophy (*falsafa*) and theology (*kalām*) was paralleled and enriched by the old confrontation between Aristotle's physicalism and the *Timaeus*'s demiurgy.

(c) *Different kinds of universals and the indifference of the essence*

In chapter 5 of *Logic and Metaphysics* S. suggests a division of the different types of universals, which goes into much further detail than anything previously written on these topics. S. (133 ff.) identifies the simultaneous presence, in the commentators, of seven

Descartes, at least according to some authorized interpreters. See J. Wahl, *Du rôle de l'instant dans la philosophie de Descartes* (Paris, 1920), followed on this issue by M. Gueroult, *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1968), esp. i. 280–1.

⁸¹ See M. Rashed, 'Nouveaux fragments anti-procliens de Philopon en version arabe et le problème des origines de la théorie de l'instauration', forthcoming in G. Federici Vescovini and A. Hasnawi (eds.), *Circolazione dei saperi nel Mediterraneo (secoli IX–XVI): 7th International Conference of the SIHSPAI (Florence, February 2006)* (Florence, 2009).

different conceptions of the universal: (1) Platonic Forms prior to things; (2) Forms as creative *logoi* in the mind of God; (3) Aristotelian universals in things; (4) Aristotelian concepts posterior to things; (5) Platonic recollected concepts; (6) Aristotelian abstracted concepts in mathematics vs. Platonic concepts; (7) geometrical universals extended and pluralized in the imagination. We are here obviously confronted with the difficulty of identifying a single and coherent doctrine of the ‘commentators’.⁸² Whereas Alexander maintained only (4) but, given his ambiguous terminology, could also be taken to hold (3) and sometimes (6), the Neoplatonists of late antiquity tend to be more generous and conciliatory, in admitting several types of Forms and different types of universals. Even in this case, however, we could ask ourselves whether there is a single theory of the commentators, or rather several discussions more or less disconnected from one another behind their apparent unity. Without going into too much detail here, we can remark that Alexander’s thesis is obviously aimed at refuting Plato’s supposed hypostasization of the universals. For Alexander, the only ‘place’ for the form is the biological individual: not the individual as such, but the individual in so far as it belongs to an eternal species.⁸³ This point is crucial if we want to understand in what sense Alexander affirms the indifference of the form with respect to its universality:⁸⁴ it is a *definitional* indifference—nothing in the *definition* of the form expresses its universality—not an *existential* one: for on the contrary, the individual form would not exist if it were not a link in an infinite biological chain. Alexander’s theory of the form thus presupposes a logic (theory of definition and the differentia), a physics (theory of the inherence of the form in its substrate), and a cosmology (theory of the eternity of the world), which remain, despite unequivocal signs of neo-Aristotelian essentialism, basically true to Aristotle’s ontology.⁸⁵

As soon as the immanent form is interpreted as something inter-

⁸² See above, pp. 267–74.

⁸³ See R. W. Sharples, ‘Species, Form and Inheritance: Aristotle and After’ [‘Species, Form’], in A. Gotthelf (ed.), *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things: Philosophical and Historical Studies Presented to David M. Balme on his Seventieth Birthday* (Pittsburgh, 1985), 117–28.

⁸⁴ On this famous doctrine see in particular M. M. Tweedale, ‘Alexander of Aphrodisias’ Views on Universals’, *Phronesis*, 29 (1984), 279–303.

⁸⁵ Alexander’s Aristotle is not Balme’s Aristotle. See on this Sharples, ‘Species, Form’, and Rashed, *Essentialisme*.

mediate between the mental concept and the Platonic Form, Alexander's hopes of developing an Aristotelian ontology sufficient to account for everything there is are evidently dashed. But the Neoplatonists, it goes without saying, are not very sympathetic towards Alexander's subtleties. And there is no doubt that the doctrine of the three states of the universal aims primarily at subordinating Alexander's immanent form to the Platonic Form.

Before Arabic scholarly circles had any knowledge of the Greek commentators, rational theologians had already developed an intense 'metaphysical' reflexion pertaining to the ontological status of the possibles which are not realized in the world.⁸⁶ Do we have to deny them any form of existence, i.e. to consider them as pure 'nothings', exactly in the same way as all those things entailing a logical or notional impossibility? This question quickly gave rise to an ontology of the 'thing', a 'thingology', which was, in many aspects, more extensive than the 'ousiology' which constituted the core of Aristotle's metaphysics.⁸⁷ Whereas Alexander considers that the sole possible world is the world we inhabit—because it is the only viable world in hylomorphic terms—Islamic theologians tend to consider the actual world as fundamentally identical to all possible worlds, from which it is distinguishable only by a superior perfection and, of course, the unique property of having been plunged into actual existence by God. (It has no bearing on the question whether we consider the distinction essence/existence at the level of the individual substance or of the world: individuals are not to be dissociated from one another as soon as we begin to think in terms of possible worlds.)

It is only in the context of these discussions that the texts of the Neoplatonists on the three stages of the universal and the form were diffused in Arabic. It is not very surprising, then, to discover that the Platonic Form was reinterpreted as the pure 'essence' of the theologians, whereas the form *in re* and the form *post rem* became two different types of its worldly realization. This shift was made even easier by the convergence, already proposed by certain Greek authors, of the universal *ante rem* and the 'Forms as

⁸⁶ See, on this question R. M. Frank, 'Al-Ma'dum wal-Mawjud, the Non-Existent, the Existent and the Possible, in the Teaching of Abu Hashim and his Followers', *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain des Études Orientales*, 14 (1980), 185–210, and id., 'The Non-Existent and the Possible in Classical Ash'arite Teaching', *ibid.* 24 (2000), 1–37.

⁸⁷ See R. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context* (London, 2003), 145–80.

creative *logoi* in the mind of God' (*Logic and Metaphysics*, 144 ff.). Such was perhaps already the doctrine in al-Kindī's circle,⁸⁸ and that was surely the thesis put forward by the Christian theologian Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī. Their positions often stand midway between Alexandrian commentarism and Islamic rational theology.⁸⁹ In Ibn 'Adī's discussions, the three stages of the universal become indicative of three subclasses of *existents*, the conjunction of which forms the general domain of existence. The first class of existents (labelled 'divine existents') contains *what* pure definitions define, the physical domain contains what these definitions define when we add some material circumstance to them, and the psychological domain contains what these definitions define when we add the specification of their mental status. We are here very far from the essentials of Alexander's ontology.

Avicenna, in a remarkable way, takes the opposite approach. The Alexandrian tradition, and Ibn 'Adī after it, was unanimously trying to make Alexander's ontology compatible with Platonic Forms. Avicenna inherits the doctrine of the three stages of the universal as part of the Greek scholastic legacy, but tries to make it consonant with a certain Aristotelianism. Hence, Avicenna agrees with Ibn 'Adī in considering that 'physical existence' and 'mental existence' are two subclasses of existence. He rejects, however, the latter's claim that there is a third domain, 'divine', constituted by the objects signified by pure definitions. According to Avicenna, pure definition does not signify that we add no existential determination, but only that we do not specify what sort of existential determination we add. The relationship between pure definition and specified definition is thus similar to that between the algebraic entity and its possible realizations.⁹⁰ Just as the 'thing' of the Arabic algebraists—their name for our unknown, x —can indiscriminately be a magnitude or a number, so can the unspecified existent indiscriminately be a physical or a mental existent. It is therefore in a very special (and modal) sense that 'pure' existence can be taken as an ontological category independent of its two possible realizations.

⁸⁸ See P. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle* (London, 2002), 116.

⁸⁹ See M. Rashed, 'Avicenne et Ibn 'Adī: sur les types d'existants', in C. D'Ancona, V. Celluprica, and R. Chiaradonna (eds.), *Aristotele e i suoi esegeti neoplatonici: logica e ontologia nelle interpretazioni greche e arabe* (Naples, 2004), 107–71.

⁹⁰ See R. Rashed, 'Mathématiques et philosophie chez Avicenne', in J. Jolivet and R. Rashed (eds.), *Études sur Avicenne* (Paris, 1984), 29–39.

In conclusion, it seems that we can reconstitute, in the metaphysics of the Arabic philosophers (as opposed to the rational theologians), a twofold evolution. Theologians, in the context of their discussions on possible worlds, were already accustomed to handling a distinction that amounted to that between 'essence' and 'existence'. A discussion internal to Greek commentarism, between Alexander's Aristotelian orthodoxy and the Alexandrian Platonists, has the effect of making every careful reader alive to the question of the status of the predicates of the essence, such as universality. Interaction between both domains produced a doctrine in which existence itself was interpreted as a predicate and in which discussion was focused on the question of the exact relationship between essence and existence. Even in Avicenna, who is very reluctant to draw a sharp distinction between essence and existence, the world is conceived of as the realization, produced by the First Principle, of a certain essence.

These three examples taken from the three volumes of the *Sourcebook* show at least two things. First, that it is necessary, now, for everyone wishing to understand one of the starting-points of Arabic philosophy—and, by way of consequence, one of the starting-points of modern philosophy—to be aware of the wealth of new facts and interpretations gathered in S.'s *Sourcebook*. Secondly, that it would be a dangerous mistake to think that the *Sourcebook* contains ready-made solutions for the doctrinal problems we meet in the Islamic sphere. In other words, we should reject the idea that the relationship of late antique philosophy to Arabic philosophy consisted of three phases following one another, translation of Greek learning *then* assimilation *then* creation. On crucial points such as human action, the continuum, or the distinction between the form and its predicates, we have seen that the Greek discussions were in fact being reused in new contexts, contexts in which rational theology, and probably algebra, played a major role. Arabic philosophy is thus characterized on the one hand by an extension of Alexander's ontology in the direction of a more abstract and formal 'thingology', and on the other by a neat tendency to interpret every event—be it a human action, a physical change, or the determination of a nature—in an occasionalist way. More generally, and if one is, as S. surely is, sceptical about these kinds of '-ist' labels, we witness the intrusion, in the philosophical area, of two new objects, the *thing* and an omni-

potent and omniscient *God*, which could not but deeply transform the philosophy of the commentators as its influence moved forward in the history of Western thought.

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