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**Avicenna's Notion of *al-mawḍū* 'al-awwal' ('first subject')
in *ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1-2 and its Latin Reception***

An investigation of the reception of Avicenna's thought in the Latin speaking world requires as an essential part an analysis of the Latin translation of his works. On one hand, the original Arabic text cannot be overlooked in order to get a picture of Avicenna's philosophical views; on the other, their influence on Latin philosophy has to be evaluated by considering the text actually read by Latin authors. A comparison between the Arabic and the Latin texts shows that, far from being a meaningless *medium*, the Latin translation is a key event in the history of medieval philosophy with a proper doctrinal significance. While allowing Avicenna's thought to reach the Latin speaking world, the translation determines the way in which it could be understood by Latin authors and, negatively, what could not be grasped at all by them – both because of the limited amount of translated texts and because of the discrepancies between passages of the available translations and the corresponding Arabic texts. This picture is further complicated by the well known phenomenon of 'double translations' concerning single words or phrases of Avicenna's texts. In order to distinguish the different phenomena usually subsumed under the label 'double translations', Rüdiger Arnzen has applied the term in a strict sense to «the phenomenon in which the manuscripts of an Arabo-Latin translation display two synonymous or semantically closely related Latin words or phrases rendering one and the same Arabic word or phrase at one and same place of the text in question»¹. This phenomenon is to be distinguished from the one Arnzen characterizes as 'false double translations', namely double translations which «are not supposed to

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¹ R. ARNZEN, *Double Translations in the Latin Version of the Metaphysics of Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'*, in this volume.

render one and the same Arabic word or phrase»². As one can expect, it is this last phenomenon which deserves special attention when dealing with the reception of Avicenna's works from a doctrinal point of view. Indeed, in the case of proper double translations the same meaning is conveyed by the two alternative texts. On the other hand, the alternative texts resulting from 'false double translations' are in principle semantically different. In this case, the reception of Avicenna's doctrines depends on which text was actually read by each Latin author.

In this paper, I will focus on the Latin reception of the Avicennian notion of 'first subject' as it is found in two passages belonging to the first and the second chapter of the first treatise, respectively, of the metaphysical section (*Ilāhiyyāt*) of Avicenna's *Book of the Cure* (*Kitāb al-Šifā'*). As it will become clear, the exact meaning of the expression 'first subject' could not be fully appreciated by Latin authors because of the lack of translation of other relevant parts of the *Book of the Cure*. This notwithstanding, some authors were able to see the main idea behind Avicenna's usage of the expression. An accurate evaluation of the Latin reception of the Avicennian notion has also to take into account the presence of a case of 'false double translations' in one of the two passages.

The paper will fall into two main parts. In the first part, I will try to establish the exact meaning of the expression 'first subject' in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1-2, which to my knowledge has so far been overlooked by scholarship. Firstly, I will introduce the two passages where the expression occurs and place them in their textual, historical and doctrinal context. Secondly, I will provide an interpretation of the expression 'first subject' which justifies its two occurrences in the passages.

In the second part, I will move to the Latin reception proper. After examining the Latin translation, I will focus on the reception of the Avicennian notion³ of 'first subject' in Albert the Great and John Duns Scotus.

I. A NEW EPISTEMOLOGICAL NOTION: AVICENNA ON 'FIRST SUBJECT'

As is well known, in several passages of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle describes in different ways what he calls 'first philosophy' or 'wisdom': it should be the science of first causes and principles; it should be the science of being *qua* being; finally, it should be the science of immaterial beings. The presence of these different perspectives emerging from the *Metaphysics* becomes straightforwardly problematic when one contrasts it with the strict criteria imposed on scientific

² See the examples of both phenomena provided in ARNZEN, *Double Translations* cit.

³ The reception of a notion has to be distinguished from the reception of the expression which conveys it, insofar as the same notion may be conveyed by new expressions and – conversely – an expression can be deprived of its original meaning. As will be clear, it is the reception of the Avicennian *notion* of 'first subject' which I am mainly interested in here.

sylogism by Aristotle himself in his *Posterior Analytics*. Here Aristotle maintains that a demonstration is made up of three elements: 1) what is demonstrated, namely the inherence *per se* of an accident to something else; 2) the axioms, which are the principles of demonstration; 3) the subject genus, whose *per se* accidents are demonstrated (*An. Post.*, A, 7). It is not possible for a demonstration to move from one genus to another one (*An. Post.*, A, 7). Moreover, the unity of a whole science (in other words: the unity of a set of demonstrations) depends itself on the unity of the genus it is about (*An. Post.*, A, 28), namely the subject genus of their demonstrations, which would be later called simply 'subject' of the science⁴.

This being the case, the question arises as to how to identify the subject of metaphysics. The great relevance of this problem in 13th- and 14th-century Latin philosophy and the new understanding(s) of metaphysics originating from its solution(s) allowed scholars to speak about a 'second beginning of metaphysics'⁵. More recently, however, it has been shown that the actual turning-point in the history of philosophy, as far as the epistemological foundation of metaphysics is concerned, is to be identified with Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt*⁶. As far as the question of the subject of metaphysics is concerned, it has been shown that Avicenna goes far beyond his predecessors in employing a rigorous notion of 'subject' which observes the principles emerging from the *Posterior Analytics*. In particular, even though al-Fārābī had already applied to metaphysics the epistemological notion of 'subject', he seems to use it as generally referring to anything falling within the consideration of metaphysics⁷:

⁴ For example, see the Arabic and Latin authors quoted below. Speaking of the 'subject' of science becomes common in Arabic and Latin medieval philosophy, but the expression is already employed by Alexander of Aphrodisias. See ALEX. APHR., *In Aristotelis Metaphysica commentaria*, ed. M. HAYDUCK, Reimer, Berlin 1891, *passim* (for example, p. 239, lin. 24; p. 258, lin. 9).

⁵ L. HONNEFELDER, *Der Zweite Anfang der Metaphysik. Voraussetzungen, Ansätze und Folgen der Wiederbegründung der Metaphysik im 13./14. Jahrhundert*, in J. P. BECKMANN, L. HONNEFELDER, G. SCHRIMPF, G. WIELAND eds., *Philosophie im Mittelalter. Entwicklungslinien und Paradigmen*, Meiner, Hamburg 1987, pp. 155-186. See also the introduction of ID., *Scientia transcendens. Die formale Bestimmung der Seiendheit und Realität in der Metaphysik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit (Duns Scotus – Suárez – Wolff – Kant – Peirce)*, Meiner, Hamburg 1990. For an overview of the several positions about the subject of metaphysics (especially from the point of view of the relation between God and the subject of metaphysics), see A. ZIMMERMANN, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik? Die Diskussion über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert. Texte und Untersuchungen*, Peeters, Leuven 1998.

⁶ A. BERTOLACCI, *The Reception of Aristotle's Metaphysics in Avicenna's Kitāb al-Šifā'. A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2006. Subsequent scholarship has acknowledged that speaking of a 'second beginning of metaphysics' would be more appropriate with respect to Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* than with respect to Latin medieval philosophy: see J. A. AERTSEN, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought. From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez*, Brill, Leiden - Boston 2012, pp. 75-76. Previous scholarship had already indicated Avicenna as one of the main sources of the discussion about the subject of metaphysics in Latin medieval philosophy: see ZIMMERMANN, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik? cit.*, pp. 144-152.

⁷ For a comparison between al-Fārābī's and Avicenna's usage of the notion of 'subject' see BERTOLACCI, *The Reception cit.*, pp. 145-146.

AL-FĀRĀBĪ, *On the goals of the Sage in each treatise of the book named by means of letters (Fī aġrād al-ḥakīm fī kull maqāla min al-kitāb al-mawsūm bi-l-ḥurūf)*⁸

«Of the subjects of this science, on the other hand, some have no existence at all (be it imaginary or real) in natural things. It is not that imagination has abstracted them from natural things; rather, their existence and nature [itself] is abstracted [i. e. immaterial]. Others exist in natural things, even though they are imagined as abstracted from them. However, they do not exist in natural things essentially, i. e. in such a way that their existence is not independent from these and they are things whose subsistence is due to natural things. Rather, they exist both in natural things and in non-natural things (these latter being separate either really or in imagination). Therefore the science which deserves to be called by this name is [only] the present one. It alone, all other excluded, is ‘metaphysics’.

The first subject of this science is the absolute existent and what is equivalent to it in universality, namely the one».

In other words, while dismissing al-Kindī’s merely theological conception of metaphysics, al-Fārābī states that *both* immaterial realities *and* realities not depending essentially on physical things are ‘subjects’ (in the plural) of metaphysics. Among these subjects, he singles out the absolute existent (and the one, since it is as common as the existent), labelling it as ‘the first subject’ of metaphysics⁹.

On the contrary, Avicenna clearly states that the existent *qua* existent is *the* subject of metaphysics (in the singular), in line with the principle according to which the subject of a science can only be one. In this respect, the titles of the first two chapters of Avicenna’s *Ilāhiyyāt* are themselves telling: ‘On the beginning of the research of the subject of first philosophy’ (T. I, c. 1); ‘On attaining the subject of this science’ (T. I, c. 2). Moreover, while dividing the theoretical sciences, Avicenna recalls what *the* subject of physics is and what *the* subject of mathematics is. When he comes to metaphysics, he says:

Ilāhiyyāt I 1 (p. 4, lin. 14; p. 5, lin. 1-4)¹⁰

«And [it has been mentioned] that the divine [sciences] examine the things which are separated from matter in [their] subsistence and definition [...] But it

⁸ Bertolacci’s translation, in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., p. 69 (in order to be consistent about the basic expressions dealt with in this paper, I have replaced the words ‘subject-matter’ (*mawḍū*) and ‘primary’ (*awwal*) with ‘subject’ and ‘first’, respectively).

⁹ See BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., chapters 2-3.

¹⁰ Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Translations of passages of Avicenna’s *Ilāhiyyāt* are based on AVICENNA, *Al-Šifā’, al-Ilāhiyyāt* (1), edd. Ğ. Š. QANAWATĪ, S. ZĀYID, al-Hay’a al-‘amma li-šū’ūn al-maṭābī’ al-amīriyya, Cairo 1960. For translations of Avicenna’s *Ilāhiyyāt* see also AVICENNA, *The Metaphysics of The Healing. A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced and annotated by Michael E. Marmura*, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah 2005. For the translation of this passage see also BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., pp. 118-119.

did not become clear to you from this which the subject of metaphysics really is, except for an indication taking place in the *Book of Demonstration of Logic*, if you remember it. This is the fact that in all the other sciences you have a thing which is a subject (*šay'un huwa mawḍū'un*), some things which are the things sought, and assumed principles from which the demonstrations are composed».

The text is interesting because Avicenna recalls as something already established that metaphysics enquires into things separated from matter in their subsistence and definition. These include both the kinds of realities which al-Fārābī had distinguished and labelled as 'subjects' of metaphysics. In the second sentence, however, Avicenna declares that it is not clear what the subject of metaphysics is. This means that being enquired into by a science does not imply being a subject of that science: something more is required in order to single out the subject of a science from among the things examined in it. Moreover, Avicenna explicitly refers to the three elements of demonstration distinguished in the *Posterior Analytics* and speaks of the 'subject' in the singular. The observance of the *Posterior Analytics* criterion concerning the uniqueness of the subject is undeniable when one turns to *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2, where Avicenna establishes that the existent *qua* existent is *the* subject of metaphysics¹¹.

However, twice in the first two chapters of his *Ilāhiyyāt*, Avicenna refers to the existent *qua* existent through the expression 'first subject'. This is problematic insofar as there is no evident reason why Avicenna should use the expression 'first subject' rather than 'subject'. The next section will introduce and discuss the relevant texts in detail.

I. 1. *The basic texts*

The first passage where the expression 'first subject' occurs is found at the end of the first chapter of the first treatise. After having ruled out the possibility that God be the subject of metaphysics, Avicenna discusses whether the four ultimate causes can. In order to rule out also this possibility, Avicenna distinguishes four ways in which the causes could be investigated: (1) inasmuch as they are existent; (2) inasmuch as they are causes *simpliciter*; (3) inasmuch as each one of them has a proper way of being; (4) inasmuch as they make up

¹¹ For Avicenna's discussion about the subject of metaphysics see BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., chapter 4, especially pp. 118-126. For the principle concerning the uniqueness of the subject, its background in Aristotle and its role in Avicenna, see A. BERTOLACCI, *Avicenna and Averroes on the proof of God's existence and the subject-matter of metaphysics*, «Medioevo», 33, 2007, pp. 61-97. Bertolacci observes (p. 74) that the influence of the principle on Avicenna is clear, even though it is never explicitly mentioned by him.

a totality. Avicenna goes on to show that the causes cannot be the subject of metaphysics according to an investigation of kinds (2) - (3) - (4). As for the only kind of investigation left, namely (1), Avicenna states:

(T1) *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1 (p. 9, lin. 6-8)

«As for the possibility that the investigation concerns the causes inasmuch as they are existent and concerns what attaches to them in that respect, then it would be necessary that the first subject (*al-mawḏūʿ al-awwal*) be the existent inasmuch as it is existent».

Hence the conclusion is drawn that the view according to which the causes are the subject of metaphysics is false.

Two remarks on this text are in order. Firstly, Avicenna speaks about the 'first subject', not the 'first subject of metaphysics': one should not immediately identify the two expressions. However, Avicenna is trying to show that the ultimate causes cannot be the subject of metaphysics, so that, in order for the proof to make sense, the expression 'first subject' must refer, at least indirectly, to the subject of metaphysics.

Secondly, albeit Avicenna's argument is not completely explicit, the implicit premise which makes it sound is easily found, once it is assumed that the expression 'first subject' refers somehow here to the subject of metaphysics. This implicit premise is the principle, originating from the *Posterior Analytics*, according to which the task of a science consists in demonstrating the inherence of a *per se* accident to its (i. e. the science's) subject. Accordingly, if metaphysics proves the *per se* accidents of the causes from the point of view of their being existent, the actual subject of metaphysics (whose *per se* accidents metaphysics is actually proving) should be the existent *qua* existent. This would be a satisfactory explanation of Avicenna's line of reasoning; however, it does not explain why Avicenna should use the expression 'first subject' rather than 'subject' in the quoted text.

The second occurrence of the expression 'first subject' is found in the second chapter of the first treatise. In this chapter, Avicenna establishes that the existent *qua* existent is the subject of metaphysics. He comes to this conclusion through two main arguments, which can be roughly summarized thus: (1) an examination of the subjects of particular sciences inasmuch as they are existent, as well as of non-sensible realities, is necessary; this examination must belong to the science of what is separated from matter (namely, to metaphysics); there is nothing common to all of them, so that they all are its states (*ḥalāt*) and accidents (*ʿawāriḍ*), but the existent; (2) an examination of the common notions employed by the particular sciences is necessary; no particular science carries out this task; these notions cannot be accidents (*ʿawāriḍ*) of anything but of the existent.

After having drawn the conclusion according to which the existent *qua* existent is the subject of metaphysics, however, Avicenna adds a further argument which confirms that the existent can be the subject of metaphysics: (3) there is no need to ascertain the quiddity of the existent and to establish its existence, in which case another science should take this task on. Hence Avicenna states again his conclusion as follows:

(T2) *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2 (p. 13, lin. 12-19)

« [a] Therefore the first subject (*al-mawḍū* 'al-awwal) of this science is the existent inasmuch as it is existent and [b] the things sought by it [i. e. this science] are the things which attach to it [i. e. the existent] inasmuch as it is existent, unconditionally.

[c] Some of these things¹² are like its species, such as substance, quantity and quality. [c₁] Indeed, in order to be divided into them, the existent does not need any division prior to them, as [on the contrary] substance needs some divisions in order that the division into man and not-man follows it necessarily.

[d] And some of these are like its¹³ proper accidents, such as the one and the many, potency and act, the universal and the particular, the possible and the necessary. [d₁] Indeed, in order to receive these accidents and to be prepared for them, the existent does not need to be specified as natural, mathematical, ethical or something else ».

In this second passage, the expression 'first subject' is explicitly qualified as 'first subject of this science', namely of metaphysics. If we assume that the expression 'first subject' must mean the same in the two passages, its occurrence in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2 confirms that also in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1 it must refer to the subject of metaphysics.

Beside the first subject, mention is made in the text of the things sought in metaphysics: they are the things which attach to the existent *qua* existent unconditionally. These are of two different kinds: some of them are the Aristotelian categories, which are like species with respect to the existent; some others are like proper accidents with respect to the existent.

As in the case of (T1), the mention of the 'subject' in (T2) can be accounted for on the basis of principles originating from the *Posterior Analytics*, which allow us to explain the link between (T2 a), on the one hand, and what precedes and what follows it, on the other. The link with what precedes is ensured by the principle according to which a science cannot demonstrate about its subject 'that it is' and

¹² Reading *hāḍihi l-umūr*.

¹³ Bertolacci: *add. lahū* (BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., p. 490).

‘what it is’; rather, a science only assumes the existence and the definition of its subject¹⁴. The link with what follows (T2 a) is due to the fact that the unity of the ‘subject genus’ of a science extends to its parts as well as to its accidents¹⁵. As in the case of (T1), however, there is no obvious reason why Avicenna should use the expression ‘first subject’ rather than ‘subject’.

All the Arabic manuscripts I was able to consult¹⁶ display no textual variant as far as the expression ‘first subject’ in both (T1) and (T2) is concerned. The only clue of a textual variant I know of until now is found in the Latin translation of (T1). In particular, a case of ‘false double translations’ corresponds to the expression ‘first subject’¹⁷:

<i>Edited Latin Text</i> (p. 8, lin. 49-52)	<i>Manuscript P</i> (Paris, Bibl. Nat., Lat. 6443)
Si autem consideratio de causis fuerit in quantum habent esse et de omni eo quod accidit eis secundum hunc modum, oportebit tunc ut ens, in quantum est ens, sit subiectum, quod est convenientius.	Si autem consideratio de causis fuerit in quantum habent esse et de omni eo quod accidit eis secundum hunc modum, oportebit tunc ut ens, in quantum est ens, sit subiectum primum.

The Latin text witnessed by manuscript P corresponds to the Arabic text (*subiectum primum* – *al-mawḏū* ‘*al-awwal*). On the other hand, the edited Latin text seems to translate *al-mawḏū* ‘*al-awlà*. Regarding ‘false double translations’, R. Arnzen has shown that some cases of « competing Latin translations may trace back to different interpretations of one and the same unclear or unpunctuated Arabic manuscript », while others « undoubtedly reflect two scarcely confusable variant readings, which either occurred in different Arabic manuscripts or in a manuscript with marginal or interlinear corrections ». The case dealt with here belongs to the first class, since *al-awwal* and *al-awlà* could be different interpretations of the same unclear Arabic word¹⁸. Anyway, even if one assumes the possible existence of an Arabic exemplar witnessing *al-awlà*, this would be

¹⁴ For the Aristotelian background of this principle and its application by Avicenna see BERTOLACCI, *Avicenna and Averroes* cit.

¹⁵ Cf. *An. Post.*, A, 28. See also text (v) in section I.2 below.

¹⁶ My check is based on the manuscripts available on October 2016 for the ERC project ‘Philosophy on the Border of Civilizations’, 2014-2019 (in progress), P. I. Amos Bertolacci.

¹⁷ AVICENNA LATINUS, *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina, I-IV*, ed. S. VAN RIET, Peeters - Brill, Louvain - Leiden 1977. See Van Riet’s introduction (pp. 123*-138*) for details on the Latin translation and the distinction between ‘texte ancien’ and ‘texte revu’ concerning double translations (I shall rather speak about ‘edited Latin text’ and ‘text witnessed by manuscript P’).

¹⁸ Their *rasm* is similar, although not identical.

too little evidence against all the available manuscripts witnessing *al-awwal*¹⁹. Therefore, there is no reason to suspect that the Arabic text in (T1) or (T2) is not correct, unless further evidence is found.

This being the case, an explanation of the expression 'first subject' is required which is able to account for its occurrence in (T1) and (T2).

Aristotle never uses the expression 'first subject' (ὑποκείμενον πρῶτον) to refer to the subject genus in his *Posterior Analytics*; the expression is used — perhaps for the first time — by al-Fārābī, for example in his *Fī aḡrād*. Of course, it is undeniable that Avicenna inherits the expression 'first subject' from al-Fārābī. In his *Autobiography*, Avicenna himself states his dependence on the Farabian *Fī aḡrād*. Moreover, a comparison between the Farabian text and (T2) reveals a structural similarity between them: both mention (i) the existent as 'first subject' of metaphysics and (ii) the species as well as the accidents of the existent as things enquired into by metaphysics²⁰. Nonetheless, the dependence on al-Fārābī's *Fī aḡrād* does not make superfluous an explanation of the two occurrences of the expression in Avicenna's work, if one takes into consideration the different perspectives proper to the two authors. Al-Fārābī had spoken of several 'subjects' of metaphysics; consequently, it is reasonable that he uses an expression like 'first subject' in order to single out the absolute existent (and the one) as fundamental subject of metaphysics²¹. In other words, from the Farabian point of view, there is a real difference between saying that something is 'a subject' and saying that something is 'the first subject'. On the

¹⁹ To be more precise, three hypotheses are available to explain the present case of double translations. (1) Both the Latin translations trace back to the same Arabic word. The *rasm* is not clear. It is alternately read as *al-awwal* and as *al-awlā*. (2) Both the Latin translations trace back to the same Arabic word. The *rasm* is clear: الولي. It is alternately read as *al-awwalī* and as *al-awlā*. *Al-awwalī* is translated into Latin by *primum*. Cf. AVICENNA LATINUS, *De Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus I-II-III*, ed. S. VAN RIET, Peeters - Brill, Louvain - Leiden 1972, p. 292; AVICENNA LATINUS, *Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina I-X. Lexiques par S. Van Riet, Peeters - Brill, Louvain-La-Neuve - Leiden, 1983, p. 6*. (3) The Latin translations trace back to Arabic variant readings: *al-awwal* and *al-awlā*.

²⁰ A proof of the dependence of Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt* on al-Fārābī's *Fī aḡrād* based on a comparison of several passages of the two works can be found in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., pp. 88-94. The text quoted above from al-Fārābī's *Fī aḡrād* does not include the mention of species and accidents as things enquired into by metaphysics; see the full translation in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., pp. 66-72, especially p. 69.

²¹ This is what could be said on account of al-Fārābī's *Fī aḡrād*. However, in a treatise devoted to the *Posterior Analytics*, al-Fārābī states that a science can have more than one 'first subject', which makes it doubtful that the expression 'first subject' is intended to work as said. For references to al-Fārābī's treatise and translations of relevant passages see H. EICHNER, *Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā on 'Universal Science' and the System of Sciences: Evidence of the Arabic Tradition of the Posterior Analytics*, « Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale », 21, 2010, pp. 71-95. See the translation at pp. 79-80 (and compare it with the one at pp. 74-75: al-Fārābī seems to call 'first subject' what he elsewhere calls 'subject').

contrary, Avicenna speaks of the subject of a science in line with the principle of uniqueness of the subject. Even before any further consideration, it seems that, from the Avicennian point of view, there cannot be a real difference between the expressions ‘subject of a science’ and ‘first subject of a science’: they must refer to the same thing²². This is exactly what makes the two occurrences of the expression ‘first subject’ apparently out of place.

In abstract terms, I see three ways to answer the problem of providing an explanation of the expression ‘first subject’ in (T1) and (T2):

(A) the expression ‘first subject’ has no proper meaning; it is *only* due to al-Fārābī’s influence on Avicenna;

(B) Avicenna uses the expression ‘first subject’ in a ‘Farabian way’, namely in order to single a ‘first subject’ out from a plurality of ‘subjects’;

(C) Avicenna uses the expression ‘first subject’ in order to make explicit a characteristic which the expression ‘subject’ does not – what may be called the ‘firstness’ of the subject of a science.

Answer (A) is not a real solution to the problem; rather, it simply states that the expression ‘first subject’ does not need any explanation in addition to Avicenna’s dependence on al-Fārābī. With respect to this dependence, it ascribes a merely passive role to Avicenna as far as the reception of the expression ‘first subject’ is concerned, which would contrast with Avicenna’s general attitude towards the philosophical tradition. Furthermore, answer (A) would also contrast with the large amount of references to the *Posterior Analytics* present in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1-2, which suggests that Avicenna should speak according to a rigorous epistemological language²³. Consequently, answer (A) should be taken into consideration only if a real solution to the problem cannot be found at all.

Answer (B) contrasts with what has been said about Avicenna’s endorsement of the uniqueness principle. However, answer (B) may become admissible under the hypothesis that Avicenna uses the word ‘subject’ in two different ways, namely in a strict sense (subject₁) and a loose one (subject₂). According to this hypothesis, subject₁ would be the notion commonly meant by Avicenna when speaking about the subject of a science, which can only be one. Subject₂, on the contrary, would refer to a plurality of things falling within the consideration of a science. The expression ‘first subject’ would then be synonymous with subject₁ and would be used by Avicenna in order to single subject₁ out from a plurality of subjects₂. If this is the case, one would expect to find some of the subjects₂ of metaphysics mentioned in (T1) and (T2), which would prompt Avicenna to use ‘first subject’ in these two texts – rather than the usual ‘subject’ – in order to refer to subject₁.

²² Cf. BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., p. 146 n. 88.

²³ I owe this observation to Amos Bertolacci.

Answer (C) implies that the adjective 'first' has a definite semantical value inasmuch as it points to a property of the subject of a science. Consequently, a concrete example of answer (C) should establish what exactly this property amounts to and how it is linked to what is said in (T1) and (T2) – this link being the reason why 'first subject' is used rather than 'subject'.

In what follows, I provide two possible interpretations of the expression 'first subject'. The former is an example of answer (B); I call it 'Weak Interpretation'. The latter is an example of answer (C); I call it 'Strong Interpretation', inasmuch as it requires a more complex conceptual apparatus than the Weak Interpretation does. Although the Weak Interpretation could be preferred because of its simplicity, I will claim that it is not able to account for both (T1) and (T2) in a satisfactory way. On the other hand, the Strong Interpretation is able to account perfectly well for both (T1) and (T2); I believe it is the right interpretation of the expression 'first subject'.

I. 2. 'First subject' in Avicenna's Book of Demonstration I-III

Before moving to the interpretations proper, it is worth observing that an explicit explanation of the expression 'first subject' is not found in Avicenna's *Book of Demonstration*, I-III (roughly corresponding to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* A²⁴), even though the expression is used several times²⁵. The following list includes all the occurrences of the expression I have been able to find²⁶: (i) *Burhān*, II, 10; (ii) *Burhān*, III, 6; (iii) *Burhān*, III, 6; (iv) *Burhān*, III, 7; (v) *Burhān*, III, 8.

Texts (ii) and (iii) can be dismissed since the expression 'first subject' is not used there in a way relevant to present purposes²⁷. On the other hand, in texts (i), (iv) and (v) the expression seems to be used in a technical, epistemological meaning.

²⁴ For the correspondences between Avicenna's *Book of Demonstration* and Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* see R. STROBINO, *Avicenna on the Indemonstrability of Definition*, « Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale », 21, 2010, pp. 113-163 (see Appendix 1, pp. 145-147). According to the table provided by Strobino, the first treatise of Avicenna's work includes topics dealt with by Aristotle in *Posterior Analytics*, B.

²⁵ I do not take into account only the exact phrase *al-mawḍū* 'al-awwal; variants are included which are due to the following: presence/absence of the article; gender/number modifications; *awwal/awwalī* substitution.

²⁶ Occurrences of the expression in the same passage and with the same meaning are not listed separately.

²⁷ In text (ii), the expression is used twice while speaking about a series of predications: it has not a technical meaning; rather, it just points to the first of the subjects of the series. In text (iii), Avicenna states that substance is the first subject of the accidents *fi l-wuḡūd* (here opposed to *fi l-qawl*): therefore, the expression is here used to refer to the concrete *substratum* in which accidents inhere, this meaning not being directly linked to the doctrine of science.

(i) Avicenna states that Platonic forms cannot be the ‘first subjects’ of sciences²⁸. A feature of ‘first subjects’ is stated: sciences only enquire into the essential accidents of their first subjects. The word ‘only’ (*innamā*) may possibly refer to the fact that a science has to assume the essence as well as the existence of its subject²⁹. Anyway, none of what is said about ‘first subjects’ is enough to distinguish the notion of ‘first subject’ from the notion of ‘subject’.

(iv) Sciences are compared on the basis of their ‘first subjects’, but nothing is said about what a ‘first subject’ is.

(v) The text corresponds to Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, A, 28, namely the chapter where Aristotle states that a science is one when it is about one genus. Without going into details, Aristotle seems to characterize the unity of the genus as extending to its parts as well as to the attributes of these parts³⁰. In his *Burhān*, Avicenna refers to the ‘first subject’ rather than to the genus:

Burhān, III, 8 (p. 247, lin. 3-5)

«Researches belong to one science only if they share in the first subject — the search [performed] in them being only about the essential accidents which belong to it [i. e. the first subject] or to its parts or to its species — and if they share in the first principles from which it is demonstrated that those essential accidents inhere to the first subject or to its parts or to its species».

According to the text, the unity of a science is granted by its first subject and its first principles. Aristotle’s reference to the parts of the genus and their attributes is developed by Avicenna in a description of the full task of a science: it does not only demonstrate the essential accidents of its first subject, but also the essential accidents of the parts and of the species of its first subject.

To sum up, in his *Burhān* Avicenna never contrasts the expression ‘first subject’ with the expression ‘subject’. The first subject of a science is rather

²⁸ *Burhān*, II, 10 (p. 189, lin. 11-12): «They are not the primary (*awwaliyya*) subjects of these sciences either (so that their essential accidents would only be sought)». Translations of passages of Avicenna’s *Burhān* are based on AVICENNA, *Al-Šifā’, al-Mantiq, al-Burhān*, ed. A. ‘AFĪFĪ, al-Maṭba‘a al-amiriyya, Cairo 1956.

²⁹ As observed in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., p. 135, about a passage in *Burhān*, II, 6 (see below) where Avicenna simply speaks about ‘subjects’.

³⁰ *An. Post.*, A, 28, 87a38-39: Μία δ’ ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶν ἢ ἐνὸς γένους, ὅσα ἐκ τῶν πρώτων σύγκειται καὶ μέρη ἐστὶν ἢ πάθη τούτων καθ’ αὐτά. I take μέρη as referring to the parts/species of the genus and τούτων as referring to these parts. Cf. M. MIGNUCCI, *L’argomentazione dimostrativa in Aristotele. Commento agli ‘Analitici Secondi’. I*, Antenore, Padova 1975, pp. 574-576. For different interpretations see Barnes’ commentary in ARISTOTLE, *Posterior Analytics. Translated with a commentary by Jonathan Barnes*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993 (2nd ed.), pp. 190-191.

mentioned — in text (v) — along with its species and parts, on the one hand, and with the essential accidents demonstrated within that science, on the other.

I. 3. *Weak Interpretation*

As previously said, the main idea of the Weak Interpretation is to distinguish between two different meanings of the word 'subject': subject₁, to be identified with the meaning of 'first subject', and subject₂. This idea is based on the following fact: on the one hand, Avicenna endorses the principle stating the uniqueness of the subject; on the other, in his *Burhān* Avicenna sometimes speaks of 'subjects' of a science — in the plural. According to the Weak Interpretation, the uniqueness principle would concern subject₁, while subject₂ would be implied in the plural 'subjects'.

Most relevant in this respect are the very first sentences of *Burhān*, II, 6:

Burhān, II, 6 (p. 155, lin. 4-5, 8-9)³¹

«We say that each discipline — and especially the theoretical [ones] — has principles, subjects and questions.

[...]

The subjects are the things such that the discipline only examines the states relating to them and their essential accidents».

While confirming that a science enquires into the essential accidents of its subject, the text allows for a plurality of subjects³². The possibility that a science has more than one subject is explicitly stated in a later passage from the same chapter:

Burhān, II, 6 (p. 157, lin. 5-13)

«We say that sometimes there is a single subject for the science, like number for arithmetics. But sometimes [the subject] is not single; rather, there are actually many subjects sharing in something by means of which they are unified. This [happens] in [several] ways: either they share in a genus, which is the thing by means of which there is unification [...] or they share in a continuous relation among them [...] or they share in one goal [...] or they share in one principle [...].»

³¹ See also the translation provided by Bertolacci in BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., p. 134.

³² Bertolacci observes that Avicenna calls individually 'subject-matters' what Aristotle calls collectively 'genus'. See BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., p. 135.

The passage also prescribes a condition according to which a single science can examine several subjects: these subjects must be somehow unified³³. The contrast between a plurality of subjects and a unique unifying thing could provide a basis for the Weak Interpretation, pushing us to identify the unique unifying thing with the 'first subject' of science.

For present purposes, the case of genus as the unifying thing is especially interesting. First of all, (T2) implies that the relation between the existent and the categories is similar to the relation between a genus and its species. Moreover, the mention of the 'first subject' along with its species and parts in *Burhān*, III, 8 – text (v) above – could be accounted for inasmuch as species and parts are subjects in a loose sense. Finally, subjects are things whose essential accidents are enquired into, and Avicenna explicitly states that it is the task of a science to enquire into the essential accidents not only of its first subject, but also of species and parts of its first subject. In *Burhān*, II, 7, one finds a certain proof of the fact that the species of the subject of a science can be called 'subjects' in a loose sense. In this case, the loose meaning of 'subject' comes along with a loose meaning of 'science': while comparing two sciences on the basis of their subjects, Avicenna observes that sometimes a science is part of another science, without being a science on its own. This happens, in particular, when the subjects of two sciences are a genus and one of its species, respectively³⁴.

There is possibly also another way to find a distinction in *Burhān*, II, 6 between two meanings of 'subject'. Subject₂ could be identified with the logical subject entering the propositions which are proper principles of a science, or the propositions which are its questions. In both cases, predicates of those propositions are essential accidents of their logical subjects. The case of questions is particularly interesting, because it shows the whole range of things enquired into by a science (not only things which are its starting-points, as it could be in the case of proper principles):

Burhān, II, 6 (p. 155, lin. 9-10; pp. 157, lin. 21 - 158, lin. 6)

« And the questions are the statements whose predicates are essential accidents either of this subject or of its species or of its accidents; there is uncertainty about them [i. e. the statements], so that their state becomes clear³⁵ in that science.

[...]

We say that the subject in the question proper to a certain science is either

³³ Cf. al-Fārābī's passage in EICHNER, *Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā* cit., pp. 79-80. All the four cases mentioned in Avicenna's text except the first are derived from al-Fārābī.

³⁴ Cf. *Burhān*, II, 7, pp. 162-163.

³⁵ Reading *fa-yastabīnu*.

entering the whole of its subject [i. e. of the science] or [belonging] to the whole of its essential accidents. The one entering the whole of its subject is either the subject itself [...] or a species of its [...] The one [belonging] to its accidents is either an essential accident of its subject [...] or an essential accident of the species of its subject [...] or an essential accident of an essential accident of its [...] or an essential accident of the species of an accident of its [...]».

Identifying subjects₂ of a science with the logical subjects of its questions would grant that subjects₂ are exactly the things whose essential attributes are proved in that science. Without going into details, subjects₂ would include both species and essential accidents, and should be related in definite ways to the actual subject of science, namely subject₁³⁶.

Whether the first or the second way to ground a distinction between subject₁ and subject₂ should be correct³⁷, one would find the actual subject of science opposed to its species and, possibly, to its essential accidents. On this basis, the presence of the expression 'first subject' in (T2) could be accounted for. Having mentioned the existent as the first subject of metaphysics, Avicenna states that metaphysics enquires into its species and its proper accidents, which, according to the Weak Interpretation, are subjects of metaphysics in a loose sense (subjects₂). Therefore, Avicenna would here use the expression 'first subject' in order to make a distinction between the subject₁ of metaphysics, namely the existent, on the one hand, and its subjects₂, namely the species and possibly the proper accidents of the existent, on the other.

Turning to (T1), however, the Weak Interpretation does not provide any reason why Avicenna should use the expression 'first subject' rather than 'subject'. Even if the distinction between subject₁ and subject₂ should be correct, so that causes were numbered among the subjects₂ of metaphysics, Avicenna's argument would not need to mention the first subject. Indeed, if metaphysics enquired *only* into the essential accidents belonging to causes inasmuch as they are existent, causes would not be subjects of metaphysics at all, even in a loose sense (subject₂). I would justify this last statement thus: if A is a subject₂ of a given science, this latter should enquire into the essential accidents belonging to A inasmuch as it

³⁶ For a discussion of the last two quoted passages of *Burhān*, II, 6 from the point of view of the set of *per se* predicates falling within the consideration of a given science, see R. STROBINO, *Per Se, Inseparability, Containment and Implication. Bridging the Gap between Avicenna's Theory of Demonstration and Logic of the Predicables*, « Oriens », 44, 2016, pp. 181-266 (especially pp. 211-216).

³⁷ Actually, I do not think they are. Considering Avicenna's chapter in its entirety and its background in al-Fārābī, it seems to me that Avicenna allows for a plurality of subjects without implying a loose sense of 'subject'. Nonetheless, I take into account the possibility that one of the two hypotheses is correct in order to grant a basis for the Weak Interpretation and show that it is inadequate anyway.

is A; if it only enquired into the essential accidents belonging to A inasmuch as it is its subject₁, it would eventually enquire only into the essential accidents of its subject₁; consequently, Avicenna's formulation of the full task of science would be pointless — more generally, speaking about subjects₂ would be pointless.

For example, let us suppose that S is the subject₁ of a certain science, while A₁, ..., A_n are its subjects₂. Accordingly, the full task of the science is enquiring into the essential accidents belonging to S and into the essential accidents belonging to each A_i. Let us suppose that, for every *i*, the science enquires only into the essential accidents belonging to A_i inasmuch as it is S. Obviously, the essential accidents belonging to A_i inasmuch as it is S are all and only the essential accidents belonging to S inasmuch as it is S. Consequently, the essential accidents enquired into by the science would be all and only the essential accidents belonging to S inasmuch as it is S. This being the case, it would be redundant to say that the science enquires into the essential accidents belonging to S and into the essential accidents belonging to each A_i, the two tasks being eventually the same one. It would be pointless to say that A₁, ..., A_n are the subjects₂ of the science, since its full task is accomplished referring only to S. The only way to speak sensibly about A_i as a subject₂ of the science is maintaining that the science enquires into the essential accidents belonging to A_i inasmuch as it is A_i. If this is so, saying that the science enquires only into the essential accidents belonging to A_i inasmuch as it is S does not only imply that A_i is not its subject₁, but that it is not one of its subjects₂ either.

The Weak Interpretation is therefore unable to explain the presence of the expression 'first subject' in both (T1) and (T2).

I. 4. Strong Interpretation

According to the Weak Interpretation of the expression 'first subject', the adjective 'first' is just a means to single out the subject of a science from among a plurality of things examined within that science. On the contrary, according to the Strong Interpretation, the adjective 'first' acquires a deeper historical and doctrinal significance. In particular, the Strong Interpretation connects the expression 'first subject' to a very technical usage of the adjective 'first' made by Aristotle in his *Posterior Analytics*. As previously said, Aristotle never uses the expression 'first subject' in the epistemological meaning dealt with here; however, in *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4-5 he uses the adjective 'first' in order to express a concept which could be labelled 'belonging to something as to the first'.

In *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4, Aristotle provides an explanation for three technical expressions: κατὰ παντός, καθ' αὐτό and καθόλου. After having defined κατὰ παντός and after having provided the four definitions of καθ' αὐτό, Aristotle finally comes to καθόλου:

An. Post., A, 4, 73b32-74a3³⁸

«Something holds universally when it is proved of an arbitrary and first case. E. g. having two right angles does not hold universally of the figure — you may indeed prove of a figure that it has two right angles, but not of an arbitrary figure, nor can you use an arbitrary figure in proving it; for the quadrangle is a figure but does not have angles equal to two right angles. An arbitrary isosceles does have angles equal to two right angles — but it is not first: the triangle is prior. Thus if an arbitrary first case is proved to have two right angles (or whatever else), then it holds universally of this first item, and the demonstration applies to it universally by itself. To the other items it applies in a certain way not by themselves — it does not apply to the isosceles universally, but extends further».

In the passage preceding the quoted one, Aristotle has explained what it means to be 'universal' for something else. Here he prescribes two 'proof-theoretical' conditions for something to be universal. The first condition is 'being proved of an arbitrary case'. The second condition is 'being proved of the first'. The example given by Aristotle explains what he means. One can prove of whatever isosceles triangle that the sum of its angles is equal to two right angles (the first condition being so satisfied). However, the isosceles triangle is not the first thing of which this property can be proved, because the triangle has this property prior to the isosceles triangle. Indeed, all the triangles — isosceles or not — have this property; moreover, we can prove this property also of the isosceles triangle just inasmuch as it is a triangle.

The present paper is not directly concerned with Aristotle's notion of 'first' in *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4³⁹. For present purposes, it is enough to stress three

³⁸ Barnes' translation (slightly modified) in ARISTOTLE, *Posterior Analytics* cit., p. 8. *An. Post.*, A, 4, 73b32-74a3: τὸ καθόλου δὲ ὑπάρχει τότε, ὅταν ἐπὶ τοῦ τυχόντος καὶ πρώτου δεικνῆται. οἷον τὸ δύο ὀρθὰς ἔχειν οὔτε τῷ σχήματι ἐστὶ καθόλου (καίτοι ἐστὶ δεῖξαι κατὰ σχήματος ὅτι δύο ὀρθὰς ἔχει, ἀλλ' οὐ τοῦ τυχόντος σχήματος, οὐδὲ χρῆται τῷ τυχόντι σχήματι δεικνύς· τὸ γὰρ τετράγωνον σχῆμα μὲν, οὐκ ἔχει δὲ δύο ὀρθαῖς ἴσας) — τὸ δ' ἰσοσκελὲς ἔχει μὲν τὸ τυχὸν δύο ὀρθαῖς ἴσας, ἀλλ' οὐ πρῶτον, ἀλλὰ τὸ τρίγωνον πρότερον. ὁ τοίνυν τὸ τυχὸν πρῶτον δεικνύται δύο ὀρθὰς ἔχον ἢ ὅτιοῦν ἄλλο, τοῦτω πρώτῳ ὑπάρχει καθόλου, καὶ ἡ ἀπόδειξις καθ' αὐτὸ τούτου καθόλου ἐστὶ, τῶν δ' ἄλλων τρόπων τινὰ οὐ καθ' αὐτό, οὐδὲ τοῦ ἰσοσκελοῦς οὐκ ἐστὶ καθόλου ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πλεόν.

³⁹ For details about Aristotle's account see: Barnes' commentary in ARISTOTLE, *Posterior Analytics* cit., pp. 118-120; MIGNUCCI, *L'argomentazione dimostrativa* cit., pp. 81-85. Furthermore, Aristotle's notion of 'first' is probably not confined to the doctrine of science. In particular, I thank Marwan Rashed for having brought to my attention the fact that Aristotle's logical application of the adjective 'first' in *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4-5 may be linked to its application in *Physics*, according to Benjamin Morison's interpretation in B. MORISON, *Aristotle on Primary Time in Physics* 6, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 45, 2013, pp. 149-193. In particular, see pp. 160-164 for the meaning of 'first' ('primary' in Morison's paper) in the expression 'first time' and for an analogy with 'first place' in *Physics*, 4. Indeed, the parallels between place and time drawn at pp. 163-164

features of Aristotle's exposition. (a) First of all, Aristotle's notion concerns demonstration, as far as one can grasp from what is said in the text. This implies that it only concerns the inherence of an *accident* in a certain subject; other applications of the notion are not witnessed by the *Posterior Analytics*. (b) Moreover, the notion of 'first' is used to qualify a subject of which an attribute is *demonstrated*. This being the case, there is room for middle terms between an attribute and the subject to which it 'belongs as to the first'; in other words, the corresponding proposition does not need to be immediate as undemonstrable premisses must be⁴⁰. There is a kind of mediation which is precluded, though. Suppose A is intensionally included in B (or B extensionally included in A⁴¹); suppose C is proved of an arbitrary A. Of course, C is proved of an arbitrary B through the mediation of A, but this is exactly what prevents B from being the first of which C is proved. (c) A last point worth mentioning is the fact that Aristotle's second condition for being 'universal' – namely 'being proved of the first' – is never defined by him as such, namely in isolation from the first condition. What Aristotle means can be grasped only because he provides an example of subject-predicate pair for which only the first condition for being 'universal' holds, and an example of subject-predicate pair for which both the first and the second conditions hold. However, he does not provide an example for which only the second condition holds. The possibility of such an example is not explicitly excluded, but it is not witnessed in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. In other words, one cannot know whether Aristotle's notion of 'first' is meant to be applied beyond cases of universal predication.

Turning to Avicenna's *Book of Demonstration*, one finds that the notion of 'first' is one of the main topics dealt with in *Burhān*, II, 3 (actually, in this chapter Avicenna uses the adjective *awwalī*, which will be translated as 'primary' in what follows). However, Avicenna uses the expression 'primary' even before, while dealing with the expression *bi-dātihī* (namely the Arabic equivalent of Aristotle's καθ' αὐτό) in

are easily extended to the subject of attributes: (a) an attribute *x* is in a subject *S* in respect of something else iff *x* is in *S* but there is something *y* such that *y* is part of *S* (in the sense according to which a genus is part of its species: cf. *Metaph.*, Δ, 25) and *x* is in *y*; (b) an attribute *x* is in a subject *S* primarily iff *x* is in *S* but there is nothing else *y* such that *y* is part of *S* and *x* is in *y*.

⁴⁰ Cf. *An. Post.*, A 2. This feature of Aristotle's account has been considered problematic. See MIGNUCCI, *L'argomentazione dimostrativa* cit., pp. 83-84.

⁴¹ Both the extensional and the intensional point of view are present in Aristotle's account. However, Aristotle's observation in *An. Post.*, A, 5, 74a16-17 seems to suggest that the intensional point of view is actually the most relevant one (because of the possibility that intensional distinctions do not imply extensional ones; cf. MIGNUCCI, *L'argomentazione dimostrativa* cit., pp. 90-91).

Burhān, II, 2. After having listed five meanings of *bi-dātihi*⁴² and having stated that only the first and the second one are relevant in *Burhān*, he says:

Burhān, II, 2 (p. 128, lin. 6-13)

«And sometimes [‘by itself’ (*bi-dātihi*)] is said of a more proper and verified notion. It is meant by it what belongs to the thing (*ya riḍu li-l-šay*) or is said of it (*yuqālu ‘alayhi*) because of itself [i. e. the thing] and because it [i. e. the thing] is what it is, neither in virtue of something more common than it nor in virtue of something more proper than it. And when [‘by itself’ (*bi-dātihi*)] is used according to this notion in the First Teaching, it includes the condition of the ‘primary-ness’ (*al-awwaliyya*). [...] For this [reason] it was said: “neither the music nor the whiteness [belongs] to the animal by itself (*bi-dātihi*)”, because the music is among the properties of the man, so that it [belongs] to the animal because of the fact that it is a man. As for whiteness, it [belongs] to it [i. e. the animal] because of the fact that it is a composed body ».

Avicenna explicitly refers to Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* (‘First Teaching’) while connecting a certain usage of the expression ‘*bi-dātihi*’ with ‘primary-ness’. Indeed, the notion of *bi-dātihi* here described conveys the same basic idea as Aristotle’s notion of ‘first’. As for the three features of Aristotle’s exposition mentioned above, Avicenna’s ‘primary-ness’ seems to behave as follows. (a) On the whole, there is no evidence of an application of the notion of ‘primary’ beyond accidents inhering in a subject⁴³. Avicenna’s examples (music, whiteness) concern accidental – not essential⁴⁴ – attributes. (b) Like Aristotle’s notion of ‘first’, Avicenna’s notion of ‘primary’ does not imply the lack of mediation between the accident and the subject. This point will be explicitly stated in

⁴² The first four meanings correspond to the meanings of καθ’ αὐτό in Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4. For Avicenna’s re-working of the first two meanings of καθ’ αὐτό, see STROBINO, *Per Se, Inseparability* cit., pp. 187-208. The fifth meaning is added by Avicenna. See below, n. 46.

⁴³ Unless one reads the expression ‘*yuqālu ‘alayhi*’ as referring to essential predication (and as opposed to ‘*ya riḍu li-l-šay*’, which would refer to accidental predication). The ground for this interpretation would be the fact that Aristotle’s expression ‘is said of a subject’ (καθ’ ὑποκειμένου λέγεται) in *Categories*, 2 – traditionally identified with essential predication – is translated into Arabic as ‘*yuqālu ‘alā mawḍū*’. However, the *Madḥal* and the *Maqūlāt* of the *Book of the Cure* (the Avicennian re-working of the *Isagoge* and the *Categories*, respectively, within the *Book of the Cure*) show that Avicenna does not identify the relation ‘being said of a subject’ with essential predication, but with synonymous predication, which is in turn claimed to be proper to all predicables. See S. DI VINCENZO, *Avicenna’s reworking of Porphyry’s ‘common accident’ in the light of Aristotle’s Categories*, « Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale », 27, 2016, pp. 163-194 (especially pp. 171-181); N. CAMINADA, *A quotation of an anonymous ‘logician’ in Avicenna’s Categories*, « Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale », 27, 2016, pp. 195-237 (especially pp. 197-208).

⁴⁴ Here I mean ‘essential’ as synonymous with ‘constitutive’.

Burhān, II, 3⁴⁵, but can be guessed on the basis of the examples given in the quoted text⁴⁶. Of course, the kind of mediation is precluded, which contradicts the very

⁴⁵ *Burhān*, II, 3 (p. 136, lin. 14-15): « It is not in the condition of the first that there is not a middle between it and the subject. Indeed, between this accident of the triangle and the triangle there are middles and joining terms all of which are accidents nearer than it ». Cf. STROBINO, *Per Se, Inseparability* cit., pp. 219-220.

⁴⁶ The text implies that ‘whiteness’ primarily belongs to ‘body’. On the other hand, Avicenna would maintain that ‘whiteness’ immediately belongs to ‘surface’, and that it belongs to ‘body’ through the mediation of ‘surface’. This last point is explicitly made by Avicenna a few lines before the quoted text, while dealing with the fifth meaning of *bi-dātihi*. The passage is interesting also because it witnesses another, different usage by Avicenna of the expression ‘primary’, according to which primary-ness actually consists in the lack of mediation. *Burhān*, II, 2 (pp. 127, lin. 21 - 128, lin. 2): « And ‘by itself’ (*bi-dātihi*) is also said of what is primary (*awwalī*) among the accidents [which are] in the thing. By my saying ‘primary’, I mean that it does not belong (*lam ya riḍ*) to another thing which then belongs (*araḍa*) to it [i. e. the thing for which the accident is supposed to be primary]. Rather, [‘by itself’ is said of] that in which there is no middle between the accident and that to which it belongs (*al-ma rūḍ laḥū*), this latter (*al-ma rūḍ laḥū*) being the cause of the fact that it is said to be an accident in another thing, as when we say ‘body is white’ and ‘surface is white’. The surface is white by itself, while the body is white because the surface is white ». The expression ‘primary’, as here employed, does not convey the same basic idea as the expression ‘first’, as employed in *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4 (cf. also *Burhān*, II, 3, p. 136, lin. 7-10). I am inclined to draw a sharp distinction between the two occurrences of the expression ‘primary’ in *Burhān*, II, 2; for a reading without such distinction see STROBINO, *Per Se, Inseparability* cit., pp. 201-202. An analogous addition to the aristotelian list of the meanings of καθ’ αὐτό is found in THEMISTIUS, *Posteriorum Analyticorum Paraphrasis*, ed. M WALLIES, Reimer, Berlin 1900 (CAG vol. V.1), p. 11, lin. 6-7 (third meaning of καθ’ αὐτό); cf. STROBINO, *Per Se, Inseparability* cit., p. 202 n. 36. Leaving aside the question of the influence of Themistius on Avicenna (cf. below, n. 50), it is possible that such additions in Themistius’ and Avicenna’s works ultimately depend on the second meaning of the expression καθ’ ὃ and the third meaning of the expression καθ’ αὐτό in *Metaphysics*, Δ, 18 (both the expressions are translated into Arabic as *bi-dātihi*). *Metaph.*, Δ, 18, 1022a14-17: Τὸ καθ’ ὃ λέγεται πολλαχῶς, ἕνα μὲν τρόπον [...] ἕνα δὲ ἐν ᾧ πρῶτον πέφυκε γίνεσθαι, οἷον τὸ χροῶμα ἐν τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ. *Metaph.*, Δ, 18, 1022a29-32: ἔτι δὲ εἰ ἐν αὐτῷ δεδεκται πρῶτον ἢ τῶν αὐτοῦ τινί, οἷον ἡ ἐπιφάνεια λευκῆ καθ’ ἑαυτήν, καὶ ζῆ ὁ ἄνθρωπος καθ’ αὐτόν· ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ μέρος τι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἐν ᾗ πρῶτη τὸ ζῆν. Cf. Averroes’ commentary on these two passages. AVERROES, *Tafsīr mā ba ‘d at-ṭabī‘at*, vol. 2, ed. M. BOUYGES, deuxième édition, Dar El-Machreq Editeurs (Imprimerie Catholique), Beyrouth 1967 (DAL, C. 23), pp. 632-633: « Then he said: And in another way [‘by itself’ (*bi-dātihi*) is said of] that in which [something] is firstly (*awwalan*) by nature, like the colour in the surface. He means: And in another way it is said that a thing exists in [another] thing by itself if it [i. e. the former] exists in it [i. e. in the latter] without any middle, as when we say that the colour exists in the surface by itself and in the body not by itself, because its existence is in the surface firstly and in the body secondly — I mean that it exists, as for the body, only in its surface ». *Ibid.*, p. 635: « Then he said: And in another way [‘by itself’ (*bi-dātihi*) is said] if [something] has already appeared in the thing firstly, or it [belongs] to a certain thing, like the surface, for it is white by itself. He means: And by itself is also said of the predicates belonging to the subject in virtue of the nature of the subject, without any middle, as when we say that the surface is white by itself, i. e. firstly and without any middle — since the body is white only in virtue of the surface. This is as we recalled before ». In both cases, Averroes explicitly links *bi-dātihi* with lack of mediation; moreover, he states that ‘colour’ and ‘whiteness’ do not belong to ‘body’ *bi-dātihi*, while they belong to ‘surface’ *bi-dātihi*. In other words, Averroes’ interpretation of these two passages perfectly corresponds to Avicenna’s fifth meaning of *bi-dātihi* in *Burhān*, II, 2.

idea of 'primary-ness', namely the mediation involving intensional/extensional inclusions⁴⁷. (c) Unlike Aristotle, Avicenna applies the notion independently of universal predication, as it is once again witnessed by the examples⁴⁸.

Having established that Aristotle's notion of 'first' finds a place in Avicenna's work, (T1) can be interpreted on the basis of this notion. To use Aristotle's example once more: if one had to enquire into the accidents belonging to the isosceles triangle inasmuch as it is a triangle, the first subject to which these accidents belong would be the triangle, not the isosceles triangle. (T1) states exactly the same about the accidents belonging to the causes inasmuch as they are existent: if one had to enquire into these accidents, the first subject to which they belong would be the existent, not the causes. Using the expression 'first subject', Avicenna directly refers to the first subject of inherence of those accidents. This is the reason why he uses the expression 'first subject' rather than 'subject'. As already observed, the expression must refer also to the subject of metaphysics, at least indirectly⁴⁹. I will come back to this later, but one can already figure out Avicenna's idea underlying this move: the requirement that the subject of a science be the first subject of inherence of the accidents enquired into in that science.

In (T2) Avicenna explicitly speaks about 'the first subject of this science', but it is not straightforward to understand why Avicenna uses the expression 'first subject' in this passage, as it was about (T1) on the basis of the Aristotelian notion of 'first'. Indeed, I would claim it is not possible to understand fully this passage merely on the basis of the Aristotelian notion, nor on the basis of the quoted passage from *Burhān*, II, 2. However, turning to Avicenna's re-working of the Aristotelian notion in *Burhān*, II, 3, a more complex picture is found. For present purposes, it is enough to take into consideration the following statements:

Burhān, II, 3 (p. 135, lin. 8-9; pp. 136, lin. 17 - 137, lin. 7)

«If the thing is predicated of the whole of the subject (like the genus, the differentia and the necessary concomitant accident), it is primary (*awwaliyyan*) for it [i. e. the subject] only if it is not firstly (*awwalan*) predicated of something more common than it (in which case it would be predicated of it through the mediation of that thing).
[...]

⁴⁷ See above feature (b) of Aristotle's notion of 'first'. The Avicennian approach in this passage is actually extensional rather than intensional.

⁴⁸ 'Music' primarily belongs to 'man', even though it does not belong to every man. 'Whiteness' primarily belongs to 'body', even though it does not belong to every body.

⁴⁹ See above my first remark on (T1) in section I.1.

As for what is not predicated of the whole of the subject, it is not possible that this [belongs] to the complex of the essential things entering the quiddity of the thing. Rather, it [belongs] to the complex of the essential things entering the quiddity of the species of the thing, or to the complex of the proper accidents essential to the thing. [...] As for the first division, it is like the differentiae dividing the genus which do not divide any species under it at all (so that they are primary differentiae of the species insofar as they constitute them [i. e. the species] without constituting their genera; while they are primary differentiae of the genera insofar as they divide them [i. e. the genera] without dividing their species). As for the second division, they are the accidents proper to a certain genus which do not encompass it and [such that] the genus does not need to become a certain distinct species in order to be prepared to receive such an accident [...].»

As in *Burhān*, II, 2, Avicenna here takes into account the notion of ‘primary’ independently of universal predication: he deals both with predicables belonging to the whole subject and with predicables not belonging to the whole subject. The real innovation of *Burhān*, II, 3, with respect to Aristotle’s notion of ‘first’, rather concerns feature (a): Avicenna takes here into account primary predicables in general, applying the notion of ‘primary’ beyond the inherence of accidents in a subject⁵⁰.

Avicenna deals with predicables belonging to the whole subject and predicables not belonging to the whole subject separately (in the first and the second part of the text, respectively). To the first class belong genus, differentia (meant as constitutive differentia) and necessary concomitant. To the second

⁵⁰ As underscored by Strobino, Avicenna’s discussion of primary predicates is part of his discussion of *per se* predicates. The beginning of the section on primary predicates makes it clear that Avicenna’s concern is applying the notion of ‘primary’ to predicates which are *bi-dāṭihī* according to both the first and the second meaning of *bi-dāṭihī* outlined in *Burhān*, II, 2 (the only meanings which are relevant to the theory of science, according to Avicenna). As a consequence, Avicenna’s notion of ‘primary’ is applied also to predicates which are constitutive of the essence of their subjects (*per se* predicates of the first kind are included in the definition of their subjects). Cf. STROBINO, *Per Se, Inseparability* cit., pp. 217-219. Avicenna’s application of the notion of ‘primary’ to predicables in general is very systematic, as will be clear. However, in his paraphrase of *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4 Themistius had already spoken about genus belonging ‘universally’ to differentiae and differentiae belonging ‘universally’ to species. See THEMISTIUS, *Posteriorum Analyticorum Paraphrasis*, p. 13. Themistius’ explicit aim is to make room for the possibility that genus and differentiae be demonstrated, since demonstration is properly about what ‘universally’ belongs to something else. See also Philoponus referring to Themistius’ opinion in IOANNES PHILOPONUS, *In Aristotelis Analytica Posteriora Commentaria cum Anonymo in Librum II*, ed. M. WALLIES, Reimer, Berlin 1909 (CAG vol. XIII.3), p. 70. For evidence of the influence on Avicenna of Themistius’ and Philoponus’ works on the *Posterior Analytics* see R. STROBINO, *Avicenna’s Use of the Arabic Translations of the Posterior Analytics and the Ancient Commentary Tradition*, «Oriens», 40, 2012, pp. 355-389.

class belong divisive differentia and the proper accident which is not a necessary concomitant. For each predicable, Avicenna provides a condition which must be satisfied in order for it to be primary, as summarized in the following table⁵¹:

⁵¹ The present analysis of primary predication in *Burhān*, II, 3 is only meant to highlight the conditions which must be fulfilled by each predicable in order for it to be primary. For a wider account of *Burhān*, II, 3, including an account of other distinctions regarding primary predicates, see STROBINO, *Per Se, Inseparability* cit., pp. 217-234. Strobino's analysis, however, focuses only on predicables which are predicated of the whole of the subject (genus, constitutive differentia, necessary concomitant); predicables which are not predicated of the whole of the subject (divisive differentia, non-coextensive proper accident) are not taken into account. As a consequence, Strobino states that « non-primary predicates are more general than the subject in that they need to hold at least of the genus of the subject » (p. 219). This is true as far as the first class of predicables is concerned. However, a more complex picture is found if both classes of predicables are taken into account. Actually, from the extensional point of view, the two classes of predicables are characterized by opposite primary-ness conditions. Genus, constitutive differentia and necessary concomitant are primarily predicated of the *most general* subject of which they are predicated. On the other hand, divisive differentia and non-coextensive proper accident are primarily predicated of the *most specific* subject of which they are predicated. This striking divergence can be accounted for, since it is due to an actual, intrinsic difference between primary predicables, which is, however, grounded on a unitary notion of 'primary-ness'. The main idea of primary-ness, as is gathered from *Burhān*, II, 2, is the following: A primarily belongs to B iff A belongs to B in virtue of the fact that B is B, not something more general nor something more specific; moreover, if A belongs to something more general or more specific than B — let it be C, then it belongs to C inasmuch as C is B, in virtue of the fact that A belongs to B. On the other hand, Avicenna's application of 'primary-ness' to predicables in general, as is found in *Burhān*, II, 3, is not based on an absolute primary-ness relation between predicates and subjects; rather, it is based on a relation between predicates and subjects which is relative to the predicable involved in the predication. In other words, a primary-ness relation between a predicate and a subject takes into account the fact that the predicate belongs to the subject in a definite way, namely as a definite predicable. Accordingly, from the point of view of *Burhān*, II, 3, the full statement of a primary-ness relation is not 'the predicate A is primary for the subject B'; rather, it is: 'the predicate A is a primary P for the subject B', where P is a given predicable. On the basis of the unitary notion of 'primary-ness', this amounts to saying that A is a primary P for B in virtue of the fact that B is B; moreover, if A is a P for something more general or more specific than B — let it be C, then A is a P for C inasmuch as C is B, in virtue of the fact that A is a P for B. The extensional conditions governing the primary-ness relation are determined for arbitrary predicates and subjects, once the predicable P is determined. Let P be 'genus'. Something is a genus of the more specific subject in virtue of the fact that it is a genus of the more general subject. Indeed, a genus of the more general is also a genus of the more specific, but the converse does not hold. Consequently, something is a primary genus of the most general subject for which it is a genus. The same argument holds if 'genus' is replaced with 'constitutive differentia' or 'necessary concomitant'. Let P be 'divisive differentia'. Something is a divisive differentia of the more general subject in virtue of the fact that it is a divisive differentia of the more specific subject. Indeed, a divisive differentia of the more specific is also a divisive differentia of the more general, but the converse does not hold. Consequently, something is a primary divisive differentia of the most specific subject for which it is a divisive differentia. The same argument holds if 'divisive differentia' is replaced with 'proper accident'.

Primary predicates	Predicated of the whole subject	Genus	If they are not firstly predicated of something more common than the subject
		[Constitutive] differentia	
		Necessary concomitant	
	Not predicated of the whole subject	[Divisive] differentia	If it does not divide the species
Proper, non-coextensive accident		If the subject does not need to become a determinate species in order to receive it	

The following examples will help to clarify Avicenna's point:

a) 'body' is a genus of 'man', but not its primary genus; 'body' is the primary genus of 'living body'; 'animal' is the primary genus of 'man';

b) 'sensitive' is a constitutive differentia of 'man', but not its primary constitutive differentia; 'sensitive' is the primary constitutive differentia of 'animal'; 'rational' is the primary constitutive differentia of 'man';

c) 'mobile' is a necessary concomitant of 'man', but not one of its primary necessary concomitants; 'mobile' is a primary necessary concomitant of 'body'; 'capable of laughing' is a primary necessary concomitant of 'man';

d) 'rational' is a divisive differentia of 'body', but not its primary divisive differentia; 'rational' is a primary divisive differentia of 'animal'; 'living' is a primary divisive differentia of 'body';

e) 'even' is a proper accident of 'quantity'⁵², but not one of its primary proper accidents; 'even' is a primary proper accident of 'number'; 'divisible into two equal parts' is a primary proper accident of 'quantity'.

On the basis of this enlarged range of application of the notion of 'primary', Avicenna's usage of the expression 'first subject' in (T2) can be accounted for. According to the *divisio textus* given above, the content of (T2) can be summarized thus:

⁵² This statement may be the most difficult to accept, because of the tendency to use the expression 'proper accident' to refer to what is here called 'primary proper accident'. However, in order to understand Avicenna's point, one has to make room for a loose meaning of 'proper accident': A is a proper accident of B just in case A is an accident of B and A is *proper* to B, i. e. A does not belong to anything external to B (whether A is a proper accident *also* of a species of B being irrelevant).

- [a] Existent *qua* existent is the *first* subject of metaphysics
- [b] Metaphysics enquires into what attaches to the existent *unconditionally*
- [c] Species of the existent
- [c₁] Explanatory remarks on the species of the existent
- [d] Proper accidents of the existent
- [d₁] Explanatory remarks on the proper accidents of the existent

At first glance, the explanatory remarks in [c₁] and [d₁] may seem to be meant to clarify [c] and [d], respectively, explaining why some things are species of the existent and other things are its proper accidents. Actually, they are not meant to clarify these points. Indeed, both 'substance' and 'man' may be called species of the existent; similarly, even proper accidents of a determinate genus are proper accidents of the existent. Rather, [c₁] and [d₁] correspond to the expression 'unconditionally' in [b]. They are meant to explain why the things mentioned in [c] and [d], respectively, attach to the existent *unconditionally*.

Looking more closely at [c₁] and [d₁], one realizes that Avicenna is just arguing for the fulfillment of the conditions of primary predication prescribed in *Burhān*, II, 3. In particular, in [c₁] Avicenna maintains that the existent is (like)⁵³ the primary genus of the species enquired into in metaphysics, namely the categories. He states that the existent does not need previous divisions in order to be divided into them. Indeed, if there were a previous division, the existent would be divided into something — let it be *x* — more common than the categories falling under it. Consequently, the existent would be predicated of *x* before being predicated of the subordinate categories: it would not be primarily predicated of these categories⁵⁴. In [d₁], Avicenna maintains that the accidents enquired into in metaphysics are primary proper accidents of the existent. This is true because the existent does not need to be specified in order to receive those accidents⁵⁵.

⁵³ Avicenna would not affirm that the existent is a genus.

⁵⁴ The idea that the existent is primarily divided into the categories poses a doctrinal question, which I restrict myself to pointing out, without trying to solve it here. Several passages of the *Ilāhiyyāt* suggest or explicitly state that the existent is divided into necessary existent and possible existent. However, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII, 4 implies that the necessary existent does not fall within any of the categories. Consequently, the division of the existent into necessary existent and possible existent would be prior to the division into the categories, which concerns only the possible existent. This seemingly contradicts the primary division of the existent into the categories, since the possible existent is more common than the categories falling under it.

⁵⁵ One could believe this step of Avicenna's argument to be insufficient inasmuch as Avicenna only states the fulfillment of the primary-ness condition concerning proper accidents which are not necessary concomitants. However, one would reasonably expect that metaphysics enquires into the necessary concomitants of the existent as well. Consequently, Avicenna should also argue for the fulfillment of the primary-ness condition for necessary concomitants of the existent enquired into in

I have stated that $[c_1]$ and $[d_1]$ correspond to the expression ‘unconditionally’. On the other hand, it has been shown that $[c_1]$ and $[d_1]$ argue for the fulfillment of the conditions of primary predication. The reason why ‘unconditionally’⁵⁶ is linked to primary predication is the following: $[c_1]$ if A is a genus of B, then: A is a primary genus of B if and only if there is no C such that C is a species of A and A may be B only *on the condition* of being C; $[d_1]$ if A is a proper accident of B, then: A is a primary proper accident of B if and only if there is no C such that C is a species of B and A may inhere in B only *on the condition* of B being C.

By using the expression ‘first subject’ in (T2) rather than ‘subject’, Avicenna means to underscore a peculiar feature that the subject of a science must have, namely its ‘firstness’ with respect to the species as well as to the accidents enquired into in that science. The adjective ‘first’ in section [a] refers to ‘unconditionally’ in section [b], which is in turn explained by means of primary predication in sections $[c_1]$ and $[d_1]$.

To conclude, it is worth observing that the Strong Interpretation seems to be confirmed, albeit vaguely and partially⁵⁷, by the paragraph concerning (T2) in the *Discussions (Mubāḥaṭāt)*⁵⁸. The expression ‘first subject’ is here replaced by ‘subject’, while the adverbial *awwalan* explicitly qualifies the relation between the subject and the categories:

Mubāḥaṭāt, 799 (p. 278)⁵⁹

«The subject of the science known as metaphysics: the existent inasmuch as it is existent. The things sought by it are the things which attach to it inasmuch as it is existent, unconditionally. Some of these things are like the species, such as substance, quantity and quality. Indeed, the existent is firstly (*awwalan*) divided into them».

metaphysics. Actually, in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2 Avicenna never takes into account necessary concomitants of the existent. Even if he did, however, he could do without this further proof because nothing is more common than the existent. Consequently, all necessary concomitants of the existent are primary (for the same reason, every accident is a proper accident of the existent, while only some accidents are its primary proper accidents; Avicenna proves to be aware of this last point: he explicitly states it while proving that ‘being a principle’ is a proper accident of the existent — see below, Appendix 2).

⁵⁶ By the way, the expression ‘unconditionally’ in (T2) is perhaps superfluous. It seems to be meant to stress the idea already conveyed by the expression ‘inasmuch as it is existent’ in a passage where this very idea is essential.

⁵⁷ The evidence concerns only the relation between the subject and the species. As for proper accidents, Avicenna’s text is quoted without relevant comments.

⁵⁸ On the nature of this work, see D. C. REISMAN, *The Making of the Avicennan Tradition. The Transmission, Contents, and Structure of Ibn Sīnā’s al-Mubāḥaṭāt (The Discussions)*, Brill, Leiden - Boston - Köln 2002.

⁵⁹ Translation based on AVICENNA, *Mubāḥaṭāt*, ed. M. BĪDĀRFĀR, al-Maṭba‘at-i Amīr, Qom 1413/1992.

I. 5. Final remarks

Before moving to the Latin reception of Avicenna's notion of 'first subject' in the second section, I would like to make two final remarks on what has been argued in this section.

The first remark concerns the implicit assumption in my exposition that the expression 'first subject' should mean the same in its two occurrences in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1-2. On this basis, the Weak Interpretation has been declared insufficient, without considering the possibility that it could work as far as only (T2) was concerned. Other instances of mixed interpretations have not been taken into account either. The rationale grounding the implicit assumption is that a mixed interpretation should not be taken into account unless an adequate unifying interpretation is not available. I believe the Strong Interpretation to be such an adequate unifying interpretation.

The second remark concerns the possibility of maintaining that both the Weak Interpretation and the Strong Interpretation are correct, 'building' the Strong Interpretation upon the Weak Interpretation. This would allow us to speak about 'subjects' of a science – in the plural – to refer to the actual subject as well as to its species and proper accidents; the expression 'first subject' would single out the actual subject from the other 'subjects', at the same time qualifying its relation to them in terms of primary predication. This mixed approach, however, is not necessary in order to explain (T1) and (T2), the Strong Interpretation being sufficient to explain both. The only advantage of this solution would consist in providing a way to account for the plural 'subjects' in Avicenna's *Burhān*. Regarding a section of Avicenna's *summa* different from the one analysed here, this problem is beyond the scope of the present paper; it is worth observing, however, that there could be other ways to explain the plural 'subjects' in *Burhān*: for example, assuming a developmental perspective⁶⁰. Future research is asked to settle this question.

⁶⁰ See EICHNER, *Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā* cit. On the basis of a terminological analysis, Eichner suggests that parts of Avicenna's *Book of the Cure*, such as *Burhān*, II, 6, represent « an early 'stage' in the development of the wording of Avicenna's texts » (p. 90), being the re-working of an earlier logical treatise by Avicenna, although they belong to a relatively late work like the *Book of the Cure*. Moreover, Avicenna seems to draw on al-Fārābī in some cases (see above, n. 33). Eichner does not deal with the question of the plurality of subjects directly. However, the texts she collects about Avicenna's definition of 'subject' are interesting in this respect (pp. 89-90): among parallel passages from different works by Avicenna, some texts speak of 'subjects', in the plural, whereas others speak of 'subject', in the singular. The matter is worth further investigation. However, the following scenario would be possible: some texts belong to an earlier, 'Farabian' stage, marked by a loose notion of subject allowing the plural 'subjects'; the others to a later stage, marked by a rigorous notion of subject observing the uniqueness principle. Within the *Book of the Cure* itself, *Burhān*, II, 6 would thus belong to the first stage, while the *Ilāhiyyāt* would belong to the second one.

II. THE LATIN RECEPTION

II. 1. *Latin translation*

As is well known, Avicenna's *Book of the Cure* was not translated into Latin in its entirety. Most relevant to present purposes is the fact that, as far as the *Book of Demonstration* is concerned, only chapter II, 7 was translated⁶¹. As a consequence, Avicenna's treatment of primary predication, which proved to be essential for a full understanding of (T1) and (T2), was not available to Latin authors. Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* were available in Latin translation, though, so that the connection could be seen between Avicenna's expression 'first subject' and Aristotle's notion of 'first'.

As for the Latin translation of (T2), there are no cases of double translations relevant to the understanding of the text. Moreover, the Latin translation faithfully conveys Avicenna's main points in (T2) – both as far as the edited Latin text and the text witnessed by manuscript P are concerned.

<i>Edited Latin text</i> (p. 13 ll. 36-46)	<i>Manuscript P</i>
Ideo primum subiectum huius scientiae est ens, inquantum est ens; et ea quae inquit sunt consequentia ens, inquantum est ens, sine condicione. Quorum quaedam sunt ei quasi species, ut substantia, quantitas et qualitas, quoniam esse non eget dividi in alia priusquam in ista, sicut substantia eget dividi in alia antequam perveniat ad dividendum in hominem et non hominem. Et ex his quaedam sunt ei quasi accidentalia propria, sicut unum et multum, potentia et effectus, universale et particulare, possibile et necesse. Per hoc autem quod ens recipit haec accidentia et coaptatur illis, non est necesse illud proprie fieri vel naturale vel disciplinale vel morale vel aliquid aliorum.	Igitur primum subiectum huius scientiae est ^a ens, inquantum est ens. Et ex consequentibus ens, inquantum est ens, sine condicione, quae ipsa inquit, quaedam sunt ei quasi species, ut substantia, quantitas, qualitas, quoniam esse non eget dividi in alia priusquam ista, sicut substantia eget dividi in alia antequam perveniat ad dividendum in hominem et non hominem. Et ex his quaedam sunt ei quasi accidentalia propria, sicut unum et multa, potentia et effectus, universale et particulare, possibile et necesse. Per hoc autem quod ens recipit haec accidentalia et coaptatur eis, non est necesse illud proprie fieri vel naturale vel disciplinale vel morale vel aliquid aliorum.

^a *Sup. lin. al. man.*

⁶¹ See R. STROBINO, *Avicenna's Kitāb al-Burhān, II.7 and its Latin Translation by Gundissalinus: Content and Text*, in this volume.

Therefore, the only peculiarity of the Latin translation worth considering in order to outline the reception of Avicenna's notion of 'first subject' is the case of 'false double translations' concerning (T1). It has already been seen that manuscript P witnesses the right translation of the Arabic text, while in the edited Latin text '*subiectum, quod est convenientius*' replaces '*subiectum primum*'. This implies that (T1) could suggest the meaning of the expression 'first subject' only to the reader of (T1) according to the text witnessed by P. However, establishing in a definitive way that an author could read only one text to the exclusion of the other is perhaps impossible. This is not only due to the possible possession by the reader of two manuscripts witnessing competing translations, but also to the possibility that a single manuscript bears competing translations⁶². Obviously, all this greatly complicates the picture of the reception of (T1).

II. 2. Duns Scotus on 'first subject'

To my knowledge, the expression 'first subject' is not systematically employed as having a proper epistemological meaning until Duns Scotus. Previous authors, as for example Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, had spoken about the 'first subject' of a science; however, they seem to employ the expression 'first subject' — at least in most cases — merely as synonymous with 'subject'⁶³.

As for Scotus, it is reasonable to maintain that he derives the expression 'first subject' from Avicenna. In the first question on the first book of the *Metaphysics*, he quotes (T2) as an argument *ex auctoritate* for the view, explicitly attributed to Avicenna at the beginning of the question, that being *qua* being is the subject of metaphysics:

Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum, L. 1, Q. 1 (p. 19)⁶⁴

« Ad oppositum pro ente est Aristoteles IV huius in principio, ut videtur manifeste ex intentione, quod 'aliqua scientia speculatur ens in quantum ens', et illa non est

⁶² This can happen both in case this manuscript represents a possible original way double translations were transmitted (see Arnzen's hypothesis concerning 'real double translations' in the conclusions of ARNZEN, *Double Translations* cit.) and in case it is collated (see manuscript F in the critical edition of *Philosophia prima*).

⁶³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, edd. M.-R. CATHALA, R. M. SPIAZZI, Marietti, Torino - Roma, 1950, L. 4, lin. 17 (p. 203): « Philosophus enim primus debet disputare contra negantes principia singularium scientiarum, quia omnia principia firmantur super hoc principium, quod affirmatio et negatio non sunt simul vera, et quod nihil est medium inter ea. Illa autem sunt propriissima huius scientiae, cum sequantur rationem entis, quod est huius philosophiae primum subiectum ». As for Albert the Great, the matter is more complex; see below.

⁶⁴ DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis, Libri I-V*, edd. R. ANDREWS, G. ETZKORN, G. GÁL, R. GREEN, F. KELLEY, G. MARCIL, T. NOONE, R. WOOD, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure N. Y. 1997.

aliqua particularis. Avicenna libro I Metaphysicae cap. 2 d: “Primum subiectum huius scientiae est ens in quantum ens” ».

When coming to consider extensively the view that being *qua* being is the subject of metaphysics, Scotus includes the following argument among the ones supporting Avicenna’s opinion:

Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum, L. 1, Q. 1 (p. 39)

«Item, ad hoc videtur esse ratio: tum [...] Tum quia passiones hic consideratae — puta unum et multa, potentia et actus, et similia — non videntur esse alicuius determinati primo, sed cuiuslibet in quantum ens. Illud autem videtur primum esse subiectum et proprium cuius primo sunt passiones quae per se considerantur in scientia ».

The expression ‘first subject’ is explicitly linked to the idea that the attributes enquired into in a given science should belong primarily to the subject of that science.

In the *Ordinatio*, which is probably posterior to the texts of the *Questions on the Metaphysics* quoted above, Scotus explicitly draws the connection between the expression ‘first subject’ and Aristotle’s notion of ‘first’ in *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4; moreover, in the *Reportata Parisiensia* one finds Aristotle’s example of the triangle⁶⁵:

Ordinatio, Prol., Pars 3, Q. 3 (p. 96)⁶⁶

«[...] ratio primi obiecti est continere in se primo virtualiter omnes veritates illius habitus. [...] quia primitas hic accipitur ex I Posteriorum, ex definitione universalis, secundum quod dicit adaequationem [...]»

Reportatio I-A, Prol., q. 1, a. 2 (p. 5)⁶⁷

«Istud igitur recte dicitur scientiae primum subiectum, quia primo continet in se virtualiter notitiam pertinentium ad scientiam.

Additur autem ‘primo’ continere, quia, sicut illud quod non dependet ab alio sed alia ab ispo, est primum, ita illud dicitur primo continere quod non dependet ab

⁶⁵ I do not enter into details concerning Scotus’ notion of ‘first subject’ of a science. See L. HONNEFELDER, *Ens in quantum ens. Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus*, Aschendorff, Münster 1989, pp. 3-9.

⁶⁶ DUNS SCOTUS, *Opera Omnia*, vol. I. *Ordinatio, Prologus*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, Civitas Vaticana 1950.

⁶⁷ DUNS SCOTUS, *The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture. Reportatio I-A. Latin text and English translation*, A. B. WOLTER O. F. M., O. V. BYCHKOV, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure NY 2004.

aliis in continendo nec per rationem alicuius alterius continet [...] Sicut verbi grati: isosceles continet virtualiter omnes conclusiones quas continet triangulus quia continet rationem trianguli. Sed non continet primo quia non per propriam rationem et specificam isoscelis sed per rationem trianguli».

To conclude, Scotus does not only derive from Avicenna the expression 'first subject', but he also understands the main idea behind Avicenna's expression by drawing the connection with Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4. However, this connection only allows for a partial understanding of Avicenna's notion of 'first subject', being limited to the relation between the subject and its proper accidents, to the exclusion of the relation between subject and species. Nonetheless, it is worth observing that Scotus seems to see that the expression 'first subject' in (T2) should refer also to the relation between the subject and the species enquired into in a science: he speaks about *primitas* and *adaequatio* in order to refer to this relation⁶⁸. A detailed analysis of Scotus' treatment of this point will not be provided here; however, it is clear that the notion he has in mind does not perfectly correspond to Avicenna's primary predication of the genus. This is not surprising, insofar as a full understanding of Avicenna's notion of 'first subject' would require acquaintance with Avicenna's treatment of primary predication in *Burhān*, II, 3, not available to Latin readers.

II. 3. *Albert the Great*

Even though the expression 'first subject' is perhaps not systematically used in its technical, epistemological meaning until Duns Scotus, Avicenna's notion of 'first subject' seems to have deeply influenced Albert the Great.

In this respect, the most interesting text is found in Albert's *Metaphysica*, L. 1, t. 1, c. 2. This is one of Albert's chapters most influenced by Avicenna: following *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1-2, Albert rejects the views that the causes or God can be the subject of metaphysics and states that this latter is rather being *qua* being. One of the arguments rejecting the causes as subject of metaphysics is the following:

⁶⁸ See the connection between 'first subject' and *adaequatio* in the text quoted from the *Ordinatio*. DUNS SCOTUS, *Quaestiones super libros metaphysicorum, Libri VI-IX*, edd. R. ANDREWS, G. ETZKORN, G. GÁL, R. GREEN, F. KELLEY, G. MARCIL, T. NOONE, R. WOOD, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure N. Y. 1997, L. 6, Q. 4 (pp. 87-88): «Secunda ratio confirmatur de adaequatione quam importat primitas. [...] Quando ergo omnibus consideratis in scientia est aliquod commune per praedicationem, illud adaequat». Actually, Scotus does not speak about species, but about things considered in a science. However, it is quite clear that it is the relation between being and the categories he has in mind here.

Metaphysica, L. 1, t. 1, c. 2 (p. 3, lin. 72-80)⁶⁹

« Similiter autem per se esse et per accidens, potentia et actus, unum et multum, idem et diversum, conveniens et contrarium, separatum et non-separatum et huiusmodi, quae sunt passiones, quae subiecto istius scientiae universaliter et ubique probantur inesse, non sequuntur causam, in quantum causa aut in quantum est prima. Et cum passio immediata sit subiecto in scientia omni, non potest esse causa subiectum scientiae istius ».

Comparing Albert's text with Avicenna's argument in (T1), one sees an evident structural difference: Albert does not suppose, as Avicenna does, that metaphysics enquires into the accidents belonging to causes inasmuch as they are existent, in order to conclude that the first subject should be the existent; rather, he assumes that metaphysics enquires into certain definite accidents, in order to conclude that they do not belong to causes inasmuch as they are causes. However, the main idea behind the two arguments seems to be the same: the accidents enquired into in a science must belong to the subject as such⁷⁰. Avicenna conveys this idea in terms of 'firstness' of the subject; in a similar vein, Albert states that the attribute must be immediate with respect to the subject⁷¹. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Albert makes *explicit* — albeit with a different expression — Avicenna's *implicit* principle that the subject must be first with respect to the accidents enquired into in a science. He does so again in

⁶⁹ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Metaphysica, Libri I-V*, ed. B. GEYER, Alberti Magni Opera Omnia, t. XVI, p. I, Aschendorff, Münster 1960.

⁷⁰ It is worth observing that Albert does not say that the accidents enquired into in metaphysics do not follow upon the cause absolutely, but that they do not follow upon the cause *qua* cause. The same kind of argument is also used by Albert to reject the view that God is the subject of metaphysics. *Metaphysica*, L. 1, t. 1, c. 2 (p. 4, lin. 47-50): « Adhuc passiones in hac scientia consideratae, quae supra inductae sunt, non consequuntur immediate deum et divina; igitur subiectum non potest deus huius esse scientiae ». Leaving aside what Albert calls *divina*, whether metaphysical attributes follow upon God at all — albeit not immediately — is a question linked to the problem of the relation between God and the subject of metaphysics, which will not be dealt with here. For an overview of the problem, together with an attempt to answer it and further references, see T. B. NOONE, *Albert the Great's Conception of Metaphysical Knowledge*, in I. M. RESNICK ed., *A Companion to Albert the Great. Theology, Philosophy and the Sciences*, Brill, Leiden 2013, pp. 685-704.

⁷¹ In one passage, Albert seems to link the expression 'subiectum primum' to the expression 'immediate'. *Metaphysica*, L. 3, t. 3, c. 6 (p. 145, lin. 2-4): « [...] sed cognoscit de his quae fluunt immediate ab ente, quod est subiectum primum [...] ». On the other hand, the former is used independently of the latter as well. *Metaphysica*, L. 4, t. 1, c. 3 (p. 165, lin. 17-26): « Sic enim unum genus vocamus, quod est unum et primum subiectum, ad quod alia quocumque modo omnia referuntur. Palam igitur est de ente omni esse scientiam unam ut de subiecto [...] Et haec eadem est de speciebus entis omnibus et specierum speciebus, secundum quod ad ens primum sicut ad unum subiectum quocumque modo referuntur ».

the following chapter, where the very unity of a science is said to depend on the relation of immediate-ness between subject and accidents⁷².

The fact that Avicenna's notion of 'first subject' corresponds, as far as accidents are concerned⁷³, to Albert's 'immediate-ness' is confirmed by Albert's commentary on *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4, where the equivalence between the expressions 'first subject' and 'immediate subject' is implied:

Analytica posteriora, L. 1, t. 2, c. 12 (p. 48)⁷⁴

«Universale autem tunc esse dicitur in demonstrativis secundum inductam determinationem, cum demonstratur esse in quolibet, hoc est, in qualibet parte subjecti: quia aliter non esset de omni: et monstratur primo, hoc est, immediate inesse cuilibet per subjectum primum. Et sic primum est quod inter ipsum et passionem aliud subjectum non intercidit [...] [...] sed isosceles habet quidem fortasse duobus rectis aequales tres angulos, sed non habet tres primum sive primo vel primitus, hoc est, sicut immediatum subjectum ex quo tota illa fluit passio. [...] Primum autem dico: quia isosceles non est primum sive immediatum subjectum passionis secundum se totius [...]».

All this considered, Albert's argument against the causes as subject of metaphysics would seem to be derived from (T1). In particular, Albert would seem to understand keenly the meaning of 'first subject' and to convey it by speaking of immediate attributes⁷⁵. However, this picture is only possible on the assumption that Albert reads the Latin text as witnessed by manuscript P.

⁷² *Metaphysica*, L. 1, t. 1, c. 3 (p. 5, lin. 77-81): «Alia autem unitate unitur ad passiones, et haec est immediatio substandi passionibus, quae insunt ei, sicut quaelibet unitur scientia, et tantum extenditur illa unitas, quantum extenditur immediatio subiecti ad quascumque passiones».

⁷³ There is at least one passage where Albert may apply the notion of 'immediate-ness' to species as well; anyway, he does not make explicit what this would amount to. *Metaphysica*, L. 3, t. 3, c. 1 (p. 139, lin. 44-55): «Sicut enim in antehabitis diximus, in una et eadem scientia diversi sunt modi sciendi, ita quod primum subiectum, quod prius se non habet, ex posterioribus, quae potestate sunt in ipso, scitur per divisionem, eo quod per priora sciri non potest. Et partes eiusdem subiecti, quae priora se habent, sciuntur per diffinitionem, et passiones tam subiecti quam partium subiecti per collectivam sive syllogisticam demonstrationem sciuntur. Sed secundum hoc scientia non est effectus demonstrationis sive habitus conclusionis tantum, sed est habitus omnium eorum quae ad idem immediate ordinantur». Observe that the expression '*primum subiectum*' could be independent of the expression '*immediate*', being just synonymous with '*subiectum*' or referring to the fact that the subject is prior to its parts.

⁷⁴ ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Analytica Posteriora*, ed. A. BORGNET, Opera Omnia, vol. II, Vivès, Paris 1890.

⁷⁵ Observe that this is problematic. It has been said that Aristotle's notion of 'first' should apply to the subject of an accident whose inherence is demonstrated, while Aristotle's immediate propositions are indemonstrable premisses. Albert uses the adjective 'immediate' in both cases. Cf. ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *Analytica Posteriora*, L. 1, t. 2, c. 2.

On the contrary, Albert seems to rely on the edited Latin text for a quotation from *Philosophia prima*, IV, 2 in *Metaphysica*, L. 5, t. 2, c. 16⁷⁶. Examining other quotations of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima* in Albert's works, future research will be in a better position to evaluate the possibility that Albert could read (T1) as witnessed by manuscript P.

CONCLUSIONS

Avicenna's expression 'first subject' refers to the same thing as the expression 'subject' does. However, the two expressions are not merely synonymous. Avicenna employs 'first subject' — at least in his *Ilāhiyyāt* — when he needs to underscore a given property of the subject of a science, namely its 'firstness' with respect to the species and to the accidents enquired into in that science. Such concept of 'firstness' derives from *Posterior Analytics*, A, 4, but Avicenna's re-working in *Burhān*, II, 3 is necessary in order to apply it beyond the domain of accidents, qualifying the relation between the subject and given species. Moreover, Avicenna's texts do not only introduce the notion of 'first subject', but also suggest, albeit implicitly, an epistemological principle which an item must observe in order to be the subject of a science, namely: something is the subject of a science if and only if it is 'first' with respect to the species as well as to the accidents enquired into in that science.

Avicenna's two main texts on the issue in the *Ilāhiyyāt* — (T1) and (T2) — were translated into Latin together with the rest of the work. While the Latin translation of (T2) is not problematic, in (T1) a case of 'false double translations' is found concerning the very expression 'first subject'. Despite this problem concerning one of the two main pieces of textual evidence, Avicenna's original notion of 'first subject' seems to have passed into Latin philosophy, influencing Latin authors such as Albert the Great and Duns Scotus. They understand what Avicenna means by 'first subject' as far as one side of the issue, i. e. the relation between subject and accidents, is concerned, by linking this expression to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* A, 4, as Avicenna did. Moreover, they explicitly state Avicenna's implicit epistemological principle recalled above. The other side of the issue, namely the relation between subject and species that Avicenna has in mind, probably remained opaque to them, due to the lack of a Latin translation of Avicenna's treatment of the topic in his re-working of the *Posterior Analytics* within the *Book of the Cure* (*Burhān*, II, 3).

⁷⁶ This point has been shown by Amos Bertolacci in A. BERTOLACCI, «*Subtilius speculando*». *Le citazioni della Philosophia Prima di Avicenna nel Commento alla Metafisica di Alberto Magno*, «*Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale*», 9, 1998, pp. 261-339. See pp. 305-308.

APPENDIX 1. ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 'FIRST SUBJECT' EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE

As already underscored, Avicenna's texts imply the principle according to which something can be the subject of a science only if it is 'first' with respect to the species as well as to the accidents enquired into in that science. Both this principle and the resulting notion of 'first subject' can be considered as Avicenna's own epistemological innovations in the history of philosophy. However, one could wonder whether this principle is correct at all, i. e. whether it is reasonable to require that the subject of a science be 'first'. Since species and accidents can be considered independently of each other, the questions are actually two: 'Is the principle correct as far as species are concerned?'; 'Is the principle correct as far as accidents are concerned?'. Consequently, the possible answers to the main question are four: (i) yes/yes; (ii) yes/no; (iii) no/yes; (iv) no/no. I would argue for the correctness of the principle for species as well as for accidents, i. e. I would incline towards answer (i):

(Species) Suppose $S_1...S_n$ are all the (mutually exclusive) species enquired into by a science and G is the subject of that science. Hence there are $G_1...G_m$ such that: G is the primary genus of all and only $G_1...G_m$; for every i , there is j such that $S_i = G_j$ or S_i is one of the species of G_j . There are two cases. (1) $S_1...S_n$ cover the whole extension of G . Then enquiring into $S_1...S_n$ is eventually the same as enquiring into $G_1...G_m$, whose primary genus is G , namely the subject. (2) $S_1...S_n$ do not cover the whole extension of G . This case is in turn divided into two sub-cases. (2a) There is some j such that $S_1...S_n$ are all species of G_j . Then there would be no reason for G to be chosen as the subject rather than G_j ; moreover, choosing G as the subject would commit the science to enquire into the whole of G , against the assumption that $S_1...S_n$ are all the species enquired into. The subject could only be G_j , against the assumption that it was G . (2b) $S_1...S_n$ are not all species of a unique G_j . Then the only genus encompassing all $S_1...S_n$ would be G . However, the science whose subject is G should also enquire into a species different from each of $S_1...S_n$, against the assumption that $S_1...S_n$ are all the species enquired into. Consequently, there would be no science enquiring into all and only $S_1...S_n$.

(Accidents) If a science should not enquire only into the primary proper accidents of its subject, there would be no distinction of sciences at all. For example: metaphysics should enquire into the accidents belonging to its subject inasmuch as it is specified as mathematical, namely into the primary proper accidents of mathematical quantity; on the other hand, if necessary concomitants are taken into account, mathematics should enquire into the necessary concomitants belonging to its subject inasmuch as it is existent, namely into the primary necessary concomitants of the existent. Consequently, there would be only one discipline rather than different sciences. According to

Avicenna, this discipline would rather be dialectics or sophistics⁷⁷; anyway, it would not be philosophical, falling short of the epistemological requirements prescribed for science.

APPENDIX 2. AVICENNA ON THE ACCIDENTS OF THE EXISTENT

In several passages of *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2, Avicenna states that certain attributes are accidents — or proper accidents — of the existent. Despite never employing the expression ‘primary proper accidents’ in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2⁷⁸, it is clear that Avicenna refers to primary proper accidents when he generically speaks about proper accidents of the existent and — even more generically⁷⁹ — about accidents of the existent.

Three passages are worth mentioning. One of them is the last section of (T2):

Ilāhiyyāt, I, 2 (p. 13, lin. 16-19)

«And some of these are like its⁸⁰ proper accidents, such as the one and the many, potency and act, the universal and the particular, the possible and the necessary. Indeed, in order to receive these accidents and to be prepared for them, the existent does not need to be specified as natural, mathematical, ethical or something else ».

It has already been shown that Avicenna’s main goal in the quoted passage is to state the primary-ness of the accidents which are listed: to this end, he underscores the fact that the existent does not need to be specified in order to receive them.

The scope of the other two passages is wider and more features of primary proper accidents are mentioned. In the first one, Avicenna means to show that the common notions are proper accidents of the existent:

Ilāhiyyāt, I, 2 (p. 13, lin. 3-7)

«[1a] [These things] are not proper accidents of any of the subjects of these particular sciences, [1b] nor are they [any] of the things whose existence is but

⁷⁷ Cf. *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 2 (p. 16, lin. 15-17). Actually, Avicenna states that the metaphysician (*qua* metaphysician) does not deal with the questions of particular sciences, while the dialectician and the sophist do.

⁷⁸ Nor in any other chapter in the *Ilāhiyyāt*. See BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., pp. 613-616 (Appendix F – The terminology for ‘property’ in the *Ilāhiyyāt*).

⁷⁹ By saying ‘even more generically’, I only refer to a conceptual distinction, since all the accidents of the existent cannot but be proper accidents.

⁸⁰ Bertolacci: *add. lahū* (BERTOLACCI, *The Reception* cit., p. 490).

the existence of the attributes of the essences (*wa-laysat min al-umūri llatī yakūnu wuḡūduhā illā wuḡūda l-ṣifāti li-l-ḍawāti*). [1c] They are not [any] of the attributes which belong to every thing either ([in which case] each one of them would be common to every thing), [1d] nor is it possible that they are proper to a [single] category. [1e] It is not possible that they are [any] of the accidents of something but of the existent inasmuch as it is existent ».

The passage is not completely perspicuous, both in its overall structure and about some of its details (in particular, it is not immediately clear the meaning of [1b] and the role of [1c]).

In the second passage, Avicenna means to show that 'being a principle' is a proper accident of the existent. To this end he argues thus:

Ilāhiyyāt, I, 2 (p. 14, lin. 3-8)

«[2a] The answer to this is that also the investigation of the principles is an examination of the accidents of this subject, [2b] because the fact that the existent is a principle is not constitutive of it [i. e. of the existent], [2c] nor is it impossible about it. [2d] Rather, with respect to the nature of the existent, it is something accidental to it. [2e] And it is [one] of the accidents proper to it, [2f] because there is nothing more common than the existent, so that it could primarily attach to something else [i. e. other than the existent]; [2g] nor does the existent need to become physical, mathematical or something else, in order that being a principle belongs to it ».

The steps of the argument are clearer than the ones of the first passage. However, it is useful to highlight the overall meaning and the unity of the argument, especially because this could help to clarify the first passage, whose goal is expressly the same.

The two passages are similar inasmuch as both aim to show that some attributes are primary proper accidents of the existent by means of the same kind of reasoning, namely by denying that they are something else. Therefore, in order to understand the argument, it is necessary to identify which alternatives are to be ruled out.

An attribute which is a primary proper accident of a given subject must fulfill the primary-ness condition concerning proper accidents: proper accidents which are not primary are to be ruled out. However, before ascertaining the fulfillment of the primary-ness condition, it is necessary to ascertain that such an attribute is a proper accident: all other predicables are to be ruled out (cf. the table in section I.4). Going into details, a primary proper accident of a given subject must be:

i) an accident — which in turn implies that it must be (a) inherent in the subject (so as to rule out attributes which cannot be predicated at all of the subject) and (b) non-essential⁸¹ to it and to its species (so as to rule out genus and differentia — both constitutive and divisive);

ii) proper (so as to rule out non-proper accidents, which are predicated of something not falling within the subject);

iii) non-coextensive with the subject (so as to rule out necessary concomitants);

iv) primary (so as to rule out non-primary proper accidents).

The following table is an attempt to read the quoted texts according to this framework:

Thesis	1e	2a, 2d, 2e ^a
i-a) Inherent	---	2c
i-b) Non-essential	1b	2b
ii) Proper	---	2f
iii) Non-coextensive	1c	---
iv) Primary	1a, 1d	2g

^a I prefer to distinguish between [2d] and [2e], insofar as [2e] could be meant to state something stronger than [2d]. In particular, it is possible to consider [2d] as the conclusion of [2b] and [2c], while [2e] would require also [2f] and [2g] in order to be proved.

As the table shows, both passages are incomplete. In the second text, the fact that ‘being a principle’ is not coextensive with the existent is not explicitly stated. The several sections of the text make the following points: [2b] ‘being a principle’ is not constitutive of the existent, namely: it is not essential to it; [2c] it is possible that the existent be a principle, namely: ‘being a principle’ can inhere to the existent; [2f] there is nothing more common than the existent, which implies that ‘being a principle’ cannot but be proper to the existent⁸²; [2g] ‘being a principle’ is a primary proper accident, inasmuch as it fulfills the primary-ness condition.

In the first text, Avicenna does not explicitly state that the attributes he is considering are proper to the existent, nor does he state that they can inhere to the existent. As for the difficult phrase in [1b], I am not entirely sure of its

⁸¹ Here and in what follows I mean ‘essential’ as synonymous with ‘constitutive’.

⁸² The text could seem to suggest that [2f] concerns the fulfillment of the primary-ness condition (« ...so that it could primarily attach to something else »). However, this is not the case. [2f] only states that ‘being a principle’ is proper to the existent. If something is a proper accident of A, it cannot be a primary proper accident of anything more common than A. This does not amount to saying that it is a primary proper accident of A.

exact meaning. However, it seems to me that the best way to explain its role within the argument is to read the expression *al-ṣifāt li-l-dawāt* as meaning 'essential attributes' — in other words, Avicenna would not refer to attributes attaching to essences, but to attributes which are 'of the essences' inasmuch as they enter within the essences⁸³. In [1c] the possibility is ruled out that the attributes in question are necessary concomitants of the existent, since they are not as common as the existent. Finally, [1a] and [1d] are meant to state the fulfillment of the primary-ness condition: Avicenna denies that these attributes can be proper accidents of the subject of a particular science (in which case they would be enquired into by such particular science) and that they can be proper accidents of a single category (in which case the subject of the science enquiring into them would be such category).

⁸³ If this is correct, [1b] would have the same role as [2b] in the other text. However, while [2b] only denies that 'being a principle' is essential to the existent, [1b] refers to 'essences' in the plural. It is plausible to read [1b] as denying that the attributes taken into account are essential to the subjects of particular sciences (which implies that they are not essential to the existent either).

ABSTRACT

Avicenna's Notion of al-mawḍū' al-awwal ('first subject') in Ilāhiyyāt, I, 1-2 and its Latin Reception

Scholarship has recently underscored the relevance of Avicenna's achievements concerning the epistemological structure of metaphysics, as well as their deep influence on Latin medieval philosophy. In this paper, I focus on Avicenna's original epistemological notion of 'first subject of science'. The paper falls into two parts. In the first one, I determine the exact meaning of the expression 'first subject' as it is employed in *Ilāhiyyāt*, I, 1-2. In the second part, the Latin reception of the Avicennian notion is investigated taking into account the Latin translation of Avicenna's work in order to explain how and to which extent Latin authors could and actually did understand the Avicennian notion of 'first subject'.

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