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CHAPTER 10

Contextualizing the Kalâm fi maḥḍ al-khair / Liber de causis

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While the Liber de causis, Gerard of Cremona’s twelfth century Latin translation of the Kalâm fi maḥḍ al-khair (hereafter, the Arabic De causis1) was commonly albeit incorrectly ascribed to Aristotle and in some sense accepted as authored by Aristotle by many medieval thinkers, modern accounts have sometimes focused on its Greek source in the Elements of Theology of Proclus as if it is little more than Proclus in Arabic.3 No doubt some have been influenced by the remarks of Thomas Aquinas who first wrote that the source was not Aristotle but Proclus in his 1272 Commentary on the Liber de causis. While Aquinas

1 With this name I refer to the Arabic work which was translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona. Presently there are two extant complete Arabic manuscripts and various other Arabic works which are witnesses to portions of the Arabic De causis. Whether an extant Hebrew translation may be from another Arabic manuscript is yet to be fully determined. The Latin translation itself is a witness to another Arabic manuscript. The Arabic text was critically edited in my 1981 doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto. See Taylor 1981. Earlier printed editions were published in Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift and Al-Ashʿābīya. Another work that in some ways intersects with the Arabic De causis was discovered by S. Oudaimah and edited, translated and published by P. Thillet and S. Oudaimah. See Thillet, Oudaimah 2002–2003. Other Arabic texts from the Elements of Theology are edited by Gerhard Endress in Endress 1973. For an overview the De causis generally, see the collected essays in D’Ancona 1995 and D’Ancona and Taylor 2003. For more recent work, see D’Ancona 2010 and 2014. See Waelkens 2006 and 2011. Waelkens’s developing research on the Arabic Elements of Theology seems to support the notion that all or very much of the Greek was translated into Arabic. See Waelkens 2012. C. D’Ancona and I are now preparing a new edition of the Arabic De causis.

2 The work is “Aristotelian” insofar as it is a product of the Circle of al-Kindi, as is the famous Theology of Aristotle (see Al-Ashʿābīya) of the Plotiniana Arabica which was prepared by al-Kindi from the Plotiniana Arabica texts available to him. On the meaning of “Aristotelian” here, see Endress 1997 and also D’Ancona 2017. Regarding D’Ancona’s project to edit the Theology of Aristotle, see http://www.greekintoharabic.eu.

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

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

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4 Thomas Aquinas, Super Librum de causis, p. 3; transl. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on the Book of Causes, p. 4. L. Mizio Puello 1972, p. 530–531, remarks that it is likely William of Moerbeke who first discovered that this work draws on the Elements of Theology by Proclus. Aquinas is the first to note that in writing in his 1279 Commentary. Aquinas early in his career seems to have followed the custom of many to attribute this work to “the philosopher,” scil. Aristotle. This is the case for his citations of the work in his Commentary on the Sentences. For example, see Super Sent. 1, d. 8, q. 1 a. 2 sed contra.

5 Taylor 1983; and Calma 2016, p. 201.

6 See The Liber de causis (Kalamī fī-maḥād al-khair), p. 136 and 282. The Leiden manuscript Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Oriental 295 (formerly Goliou 206) ascribes the work to Aristotle: Kitāb al-dāḥīṣ li-Aristūdīs fi al-khaṣr al-makhā. “The book of Aristotle’s Exposition on the Pure Good.” The Latin tradition generally ascribes it to Aristotle, as does one of the earliest and most important Latin manuscripts, Aosta, Seminario maggiore 71 (olim Al D 20) which has Liber Aristotelis de expositione bonitatis purae: “The Book of Aristotle on the Exposition of the Pure Good.” Ankara, Ankara University, Dil ve Tarih-İsklafı Fakültesi Kütüphanesi, MS Ismail Saib 1 1596, has “Discourse on the Pure Good. It is said that Proclus excerpted it from the Discourse of Plato and it is also said that it is by Plato.” The issue of the differing ascriptions found in the Arabic manuscripts will be addressed in the new edition of the Arabic De causis now in preparation.

7 This valuable term is first set out in Endress 1997. On the meaning of ‘Aristotelian’ here, see Endress 1997 and also D’Ancona 2017.
and other texts from the available *Plotiniana Arabica*. This may be why two manuscripts attribute the *Arabic De causis* to Aristotle. In the preface to the *Theology of Aristotle* the author—presumably al-Kindī himself—indicates the *Theology of Aristotle* is based on a translation by the Christian Ibn Nāʿima al-Ḥimṣī, something that likely applies to all the texts of the *Plotiniana Arabica* because of the similarity of vocabulary and doctrine. The *Plotiniana Arabica* itself in its three collections, the *Theology of Aristotle*, the ps.-Farabian Letter on Divine Science, and the Sayings of the Greek Wisemen, considered as a whole is a work of translations, paraphrases and distinctively innovative doctrines regularly transforming Plotinian teachings to its own ends. The novel teachings of the *Plotiniana Arabica* also are foundational for the unknown author of the *Arabic De causis*. This is simply because, though the *Arabic De causis* employs translations of texts of the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus, those are often sculpted to fit the vocabulary and doctrine found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* as well as to fit the reasoning the author of the *Arabic De causis* is constructing in his particular argumentative contexts. Further, in the case of one of the most important metaphysical chapters of the *Arabic De causis*, there is no direct use of any text of the *Elements of Theology* at all; rather, nearly the entire chapter is formed by teachings found in the three works making up the *Plotiniana Arabica*.

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

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9 D’Ancona 2017, p. 10; Adamson 2002, p. 7–9; Adamson 2017, section 2. Historical questions. Some fascinating conjectures about Ibn Nāʿima and the Christian contexts of his time are discussed in Treiger 2015. My thanks to M. Chase for calling my attention to this and for other valuable corrections and suggestions.
11 This has been well established by C. D’Ancona in a long series of articles on the *Arabic De causis*. See her collection in D’Ancona 1993a, particularly D’Ancona 1993b. Also see D’Ancona 1993.
13 D’Ancona argues for an influence of the *Procloiana Arabica* on teachings found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* in D’Ancona 1999, 83f.
rather derives from the *Plotiniana Arabica* and just two additional sample passages of the *Arabic De causis* which evidence clearly the author's adherence to the teachings of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. The latter two selections display the author's efforts to modify the texts and ideas of the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus to form his work into the distinctive treatise that we have today. I then consider the *Arabic De causis* both as a Neoplatonic contribution to the development of metaphysical thought in the early period of philosophy in the lands of Islam and also as a work furthering the agenda of al-Kindi to show the compatibility and complementarity of philosophy to the ends of Islamic—if not more broadly Abrahamic—religion in the context of ninth century Baghdad. I conclude with a brief summary of what has been reasoned in the two major parts of this article.

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

While the author of the *Arabic De causis* accesses texts from an Arabic version of the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus, he pulls those texts into his own philosophical context already dominated by a metaphysics based on the *Plotiniana Arabica* and the *Circle of al-Kindi*. Regarding the First Cause, the *Sayings of the Greek Wiseman* sets forth a conception of It as the True One (*al-wāhid al-haqq*) and as the Pure True Being (*al-huwwīya al-haqqa al-mahda*) which is without adornment or form. As such It is only being (*lā hīya la-hā wa-lā šūra la-hā ... annīyya faqat*). As Creator It is unlike any of the created things and unique (*al-mubdī al-`awwal lā yushbīsh šai' min al-`ashyā' ... al-mubdī al-`awwal wāhid wa-ha-du-hu*). As First Agent It is the unmoving emanative cause of the first effect, intellect, through which things intelligible and sensible emanate from It (*al-fā`il al-`awwal ... sākin ghaira mutahark... al-ma`lāl al-`awwal ... inbajasa min-hu*

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14 See the list of source propositions of Proclus's *Elements of Theology* for the *Arabic De causis* in D'Ancona 1955b, p. 191.

15 *Hīya* can mean jewelry or something adorning a person. D'Ancona translates it as “determination formelle” and indicates the sense of predicate. Hence, the First Cause transcends predication and names except in the limited sense that It may be denominated through Its effects, a sense that does not capture the very nature of the First Cause in itself. See D'Ancona 1955a, p. 18, 20, 105, 118, 117, 152.

16 Wakelin 244, p. 93; 88; 94–96 respectively. For this article I draw key Arabic texts largely although not solely from Wakelin’s edition with translation of Oxford, Bold. Or Marsh 539 which contains many of the extant *Sayings of the Greek Wiseman*, though I freely modify the translation at times to show the similarity of the Arabic in that work and the *Arabic De causis*. 
sā'ir al-‘ashyā’ al-‘aqīqya wa-al-ḥissa bi-tawassut al-‘aqīl).\textsuperscript{17} And the Theology of Aristotle has a consideration of \textit{Enneads} \textit{IV} 7.3 with a summarizing account as follows:

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

Further, the True One, while It remains beyond the reach of created knowledge, is Itself the pure transcendent knowledge which encompasses every sort of knowledge and is the cause of all the kinds of knowledge (\textit{huwa al-īlm al-mahd al-‘aqāř al-muhit bi-kull ʾīlm wa ʾilla al-ʿulūm}). Since It is without form, the First Creator is unlimited or infinite in every way (\textit{fa-huwa min kull al-jihāt ghairā mutanāhk}) and not in any way a plurality (\textit{kathāran min jīha}).\textsuperscript{19} It is what conserves (\textit{Ṣāfīzū-ḥā}) all created things, for Its essence is the Pure True Good (\textit{dhāt-hu hiya al-khār al-mahd al-ḥaqq}).\textsuperscript{20}

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Wakelnig 2014}, p. 94–96; and 94.

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

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Wakelnig 2014}, p. 98 and 100 respectively.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Wakelnig 2014}, p. 102 and 98 respectively.
of things. It sustains and encompasses all the things below it. For what is
primary for things and a cause of them sustains those things and governs
(mutabibin) them, and none of them eludes it due to its exalted power.
Intelect, then, is ruler (ra‘is) of all the things below it, sustaining and gov-
erning them. Just as nature governs over the things below it through the
power of soul, likewise soul governs the things below it by the power of
intellect as intellect similarly governs nature through divine power. Intel-
lect came to sustain things which are after it, to govern them and to exalt
its power over them only because it is an intellectual power which is a
power neither characteristic of soul nor characteristic of nature because
they are not a substantial power belonging to it. Rather, it is the power of
substantial powers because it is the cause of them.

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

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

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21 Square brackets indicate my addition, mostly of the referents of pronouns. This translation
is based on a draft of a newly revised edition of the Arabic De causis in preparation
by Cristina D'Ancona and myself. The text and translation in my unpublished disserta-
tion are close to this. See The Liber de causis (Kalân fi makh al-khua’), p. 298–300. Cf. Die
For the metaphysical teachings in chapter 8 of the *Arabic de causis* the author clearly draws on the *Plotiniana Arabica* from all three of the collections extant today: the *Sayings of the Greek Wiseman*, the *Theology of Aristotle* and the pseudo-Farabian *Epistle on the Divine Science*. The doctrines of the One (i) as pure being and only being without adornment (*hilya*) or form (*sura*), (ii) as the Creator and cause of intellect and through the mediation of intellect cause of soul and of nature, (iii) as the Pure Good, (iv) as Itself infinite, and more are the same in both the *Plotiniana Arabica* and the *Arabic de causis* with the same vocabulary used in both works.22

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

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22 For a more detailed account of the doctrines and sources of this Chapter, see D’Ancona 1995b.
23 Of this D’Ancona writes, “the Arabic sentence gives a distinct non-Plotinian ring” D’Ancona 2002, p. 148. Also see p. 149. Still, for a discussion of passages in which Plotinus attributes to the One knowledge or intellect of some sort, see Bussanich 1987.
24 See, e.g., Plotinus, *Enneads* v 1, 9. For more references and discussion, see Rist 1973.
25 For the translator, however, this may not have been a mistake but rather a confirmation of the truth of God as all knowing, a teaching common to the Abrahamic religious traditions. This issue will have to be taken up elsewhere. Note, however, that M. Chase argues in his article in the present volume that this notion may come from Porphyr.
adaptor has taken that description of the One as noeton from the perspective of Nous and applied it as a predicate characterizing the One or Creator Itself. Hence, in the Epistle on the Divine Science it can be said that the Creator and First Cause is in Its own right noeton, knows Itself, and, thus, has Divine Knowledge. This is the doctrine we find set out in chapter 8 of the Arabic De causis, a doctrine that can be seen in context to draw upon Aristotle as well as Plotinus.26 Still, to say that the First Cause has knowledge or is not without knowledge does not imply that Its knowledge is derived from the world, that is, from anything outside Itself.

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

The first sample is a partial extract from the beginning of Chapter 5 of the Arabic De causis27 where we find the following:

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

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

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

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

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

Here the author of the Plotiniana Arabica provides a close rendering of Enneads v 6.4.14–22, with some elaboration. Plotinus himself writes,

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

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

The second sample comes from *Arabic De causis* Chapter 21. Aquinas had some difficulty locating the precise source in Proclus for this chapter and suggested that it is generally based on Propositions 15 and 18 of the *Elements of Theology*. D’Ancona, however, has suggested that this chapter is in some way related to Proposition 131.

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

This chapter of the *Arabic De causis* may well have Proposition 131 in Proclus as a source, but it seems to have been expressed here in accord with the doctrines of the *Plotiniana Arabica*. In book 10 of the *Theology of Aristotle* we find the following which draws on Plotinus, *Enneads* V 2.1. The italicized text approximates the Greek of Plotinus.

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

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

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

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


36 For another good example, see Arabic De causis Chapter 19. This and other similar examples will be discussed in edition of the Arabic now underway. It is worth mentioning that,
Brief Remarks on the Doctrinal and Historical Context of the
Arabic De causis as a Product of the Circle of al-Kindi in Ninth
Century Baghdad

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

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

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

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

See The Liber de causis (Kalām fi maḥd al-khāṣ), p. 137-143. Cf. Die pseudo-ariotische Schrift, p. 58-60, Al-Afiṭātu'lla, p. 3-4. On this chapter, see D'Ancona 1999 and 2001. For the author of the Arabic De causis, this is a metaphysical form of causality and paradigmatic participation such that the being of everything is established by the First Cause alone. A form of this teaching is endorsed by Thomas Aquinas in his Commentary on the Sentences at Book 2, d.1, q.1a. 4. sol. See Thomas Aquinas, Sententiarum super libros Sententiarum, p. 25-26. This teaching is discussed in Taylor forthcoming.

See Taylor 2012 for a complete translation of Chapter 1.
for lower things. Avicenna speaks of two forms of ībdāʿ or creation. One is absolute creation ex nihilo presupposing nothing inside shared by the Necessary Being and nothing outside it. Rather, the positing of the Necessary Being immediately entails the Necessary Being’s creation of Intellect. The other is a secondary sense of ībdāʿ on the part of what has been created presupposing a prior cause, scil., the creative emanation of intellects, souls and celestial spheres each depending for its substance and power on what is above it.39 Rather, this causality set out in Chapter 1 and in later chapters called creation on the part of the First Cause as Pure Being and True One (Chapter 4), as well as True Agent (Chapter 19), appears to be a Neoplatonic blend of some sort of creative efficient causality and paradigmatic causality.40 The First Cause as

40 I say "some sort of creative efficient causality" because the author of the Arābic De causis contends in Chapter 4 that the First Cause creates directly only the first created being, scil. Intellect, and all other things through the mediation of Intellect. Here, then, there is efficient originative causality in the action of the First Cause in the case of Intellect. After that, however, there is mediate creation through Intellect, yet not such that the Intellect can be called creator. Rather, only the First Cause can be called creator. Further, the author says that the First Cause alone creates the being of all things while other causes act on things only "in the manner of form, not in the matter of creation" (Chapter 27). According to the author of the Arābic De causis, then, though there is emanative efficient causality on the part of the First Cause in the singular case of the efficient causing of Intellect, a paradigmatic causality of participation runs through Intellect, Soul and Nature such that the transcendent pure being of the First Cause is cause of the foundational being of all other things which are but diminished images or kinds. In a forthcoming article, D’Ancona remarks that "il n’est pas nécessaire que la cause opère selon la modalité de l’efficience. Non seulement dans le monde sensible il y a des réalités qui opèrent de la sorte, mais c’est la règle dans le cas des principes intelligibles qui sont les causes véritables de la structure rationnelle immanente dans les choses, et par conséquent de leur existence même. Telle étant la causalité immobile des intelligibles, un seul et même principe peut "produire" des effets multiples et divers, non pas malgré le fait qu’il demeure immuable, mais précisément grâce à cela. Si, comme c’est le cas, la causalité immobile et toujours égale à elle-même d’un principe intelligible se retrouve participée selon des degrés différents dans ses participants, cela s’explique par une différente capacité de réception de la part de ceux-ci." (D’Ancona forthcoming.) For Aquinas, however, both efficient causality of being (conceived in terms of a distinction of existence from essence under the influence of Avicenna) and paradigmatic causality (found in the Arābic De causis and also in Chapter 5 of On the Divine Names by [ps.-]Dionysius) are involved. See Thomas Aquinas, Scriptum super libros Sententiarum, lib. 11, d. 1, q1 a. 4, p. 25–26. The analysis of Aquinas surely draws on what the young Thomas learned in Cologne when he attended presentations of the Commentary on the Divine Names by his teacher Albertus Magnus. See Albert’s commentary on Chapter 5 where he relates the accounts of [ps.-]Dionysius to the philosophical work of the Liber de causis, Avicenna and Aristotle. Albertus Magnus, Super
uniquely Pure Being, True One, and True Agent is the ultimate source for the being and unity found in any thing. As the first chapter asserts, the First Cause provides the formal substrate of being upon which other formalities are built.\footnote{Dionysius De Divinis Nominius, p. 303–326. For more on these matters and causality in the \textit{Arabic De causis}, see Taylor forthcoming. Cf. Taylor 2019, p. 344f.} The First Cause as transcendent and unparticipated Pure Being is the cause of all lower beings by providing the participated perfection of being which is the foundation for other formalities at all levels.\footnote{Taylor 1999, p. 506–507: "\textit{Amiyya}, translated into Latin from the Arabic as \textit{esse}, is the formal substrate on the basis of which further perfections such as life and intelligence are received. In the \textit{De Causis} there is no notion of being as the act of existence such as we find it in the thought of St. Thomas." The term \textit{huwiyah} as well as \textit{amiyya} has the sense of being. See Chapters 15, 17, 19, 31.} In this sense, other formalities provided by paradigmatic realities below the First Cause can be causes of rationality and life, for example, formalities that can be removed such that a human being can have rationality and life removed and yet still be a being, as rehearsed in Chapter 1. This must be read together with the second half of Chapter 31 in which the argument is made that there must be a True One which is the unique cause of every sort of unity in things\footnote{The account of the transcendent unparticipated, the participated property and the participant is set out by Proclus in Proposition 23, Proclus 1993, p. 26–27, and elsewhere in various forms in \textit{The Elements of Theology}, such as Proposition 123 cited above.} and Chapter 8 and others where the First Cause is itself pure being without delimiting form. It is on the basis of the identity of the First Cause as Pure Being and True One and on the basis of Neoplatonic participation in the paradigmatic causality of the unparticipated transcendent paradigm and the participating lower image that the author of the \textit{Arabic De causis} claims that the First Cause alone is the Creator.\footnote{There must then be a true one which causes the acquisition of unities and does not acquire (its unity), while all the rest of the unities are acquired." Chapter 31, \textit{The Liber de causis} (\textit{Kalam fi ma'ad al-khwa'ir}), p. 275. This text remains the same in draft of the new edition of the \textit{Arabic De causis}.}
This is the reasoned foundation for the teaching that the First Cause alone is the Creator that gives being to each and everything, directly to intellect which is its first effect and mediately through intellect to soul, nature and all the rest of created things. Other causes act by giving form, but only the First Cause is the cause of being.\textsuperscript{45} This philosophical account of primary causality, an account of creation as found in the Circle of al-Kindi, shows that the study of philosophy yields a conception of God as Creator without easily apparent discordance with the religious understanding that Allah\textsuperscript{46} is the unitary Creator whose Tawhīd or absolute unity permeates and grounds all other things in unity and being.\textsuperscript{47} This metaphysical account found in the Circle of al-Kindi is part of what Gerhard Endress has insightfully described as part of a

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

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

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


\textsuperscript{46} See Arabic De causis, chapter 22, the sole chapter in which we find Allāh. The Liber de causis (Kalâm fi maḥd al-khār), p. 235–238. Cf. Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift, p. 163–164; Al-Aflāṭūnīyya, p. 23–24.

\textsuperscript{47} On tawhīd in the philosophical context, see Wakelnic 2015. Whether this account is fully in accord with literal accounts in the Abrahamic religions is another question to be addressed elsewhere.

\textsuperscript{48} Endress 2000, p. 369.
truth. The complete and most noble philosopher is therefore necessarily the man who comprehends this most noble knowledge, because the knowledge of the cause is more noble than the knowledge of the effect. For we only know each of the effects completely when we comprehend the knowledge of its cause. 49

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

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

He then concludes his opening apologia for philosophy, writing,

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

49 Al-Kindi, The Philosophical Works, p. 12.
50 Al-Kindi, The Philosophical Works, p. 13.
who do not believe in His grace, and who deviate from the path of truth
that is pleasing to Him.\footnote{51}

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

\footnote{51}{Al-Kindi, The Philosophical Works, p. 13–14.}
\footnote{52}{See D'Ancona 1999.}
\footnote{53}{https://quran.com/50/16.}
conjunction with the later explicit discussions of creation and the identification of the First Cause with God provides a fine instance what al-Kindi referred to as a proper role for philosophy in the context of Islam. It is a philosophical text easily read as consonant with religious understandings of the Divinity and Its causality and as such constitutes a proof and example of the value of philosophy to the apprehension of the meaning of Divine Tawhid.54

3 Concluding Remarks

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

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

55 Calma 2016.
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