

Philosophy and the Abrahamic Religions:  
Scriptural Hermeneutics and Epistemology

Edited by

Torrance Kirby, Rahim Acar and Bilal Baş

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# A FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ARABIC TREATISE *ON THE PLATONIC INTELLECTUAL IDEAS*

ALEXANDER TREIGER

### Introduction

The anonymous treatise *On the Platonic Intellectual Ideas* (*Risāla fī al-Muthul al-‘aqlīya al-Aflātūniya*),<sup>1</sup> edited by ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī in 1947 on the basis of four Cairo manuscripts,<sup>2</sup> has recently received a careful consideration and a complete German translation in Rüdiger Arnzen’s monograph on the *Nachwirkung* of Plato’s theory of Ideas in Arabic philosophy.<sup>3</sup> In what follows, I shall revisit some of the data

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\* I am deeply grateful to Prof. Dimitri Gutas for his comments on an earlier draft of this article, originally written in 2002 as a term paper, as well as for his careful advice throughout the years.

<sup>1</sup> For the full title of the treatise see the analytical section below. The term *mithāl* is translated throughout this paper as “Idea” (capitalized) and the term *ṣūra* as “form” (capitalized if it means “Idea”). On the term *mithāl*, see also the brief terminological study in the Appendix below.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī (ed.), *al-Muthul al-‘aqlīya al-Aflātūniya* (Cairo, 1947) [abbreviated as *Muthul*]; for a description of the four Cairo manuscripts see the editor’s introduction, 49-61. In the introduction to his edition (48-49), Badawī refers to three additional manuscripts preserved in Istanbul that he was unable to consult: MSS Aya Sofya 2455 (dated 740AH/1339-40); Aya Sofya 2457, fol. 198v-269v (dated 863AH/1459, which also includes the famous Neoplatonic treatise *The Theology of Aristotle* [=MS Ş in Badawī’s edition of the *Theology*]); and Laleli 2493, fol. 41r-107r. Another copy (not mentioned by Badawī) seems to be extant in MS Esad Efendi 1922.

<sup>3</sup> Rüdiger Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen in der arabischen Philosophie: Texte und Materialien zur Begriffsgeschichte von ṣuwar aflātūniyya und muthul aflātūniyya*, Scientia Graeco-Arabica 6 (Berlin and Boston, 2011), 175-184 (study) and 213-

related to this rich and fascinating text and offer an analysis of its structure and content and a first English translation of several sections of it.

In the introduction to his edition of the treatise, Badawī was able to date it as between 730/1329 and 740/1339—a dating confirmed by Arnzen. The terminus post quem is provided by the death date of Kamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (or: al-Kāshī) who is mentioned in the treatise with the eulogy *rahimahū Llāh* (“may God have mercy on his soul”),<sup>4</sup> the terminus ante quem is supplied by the date of the earliest dated manuscript (MS Aya Sofya 2455) containing the treatise.<sup>5</sup> As far as the author of the treatise is concerned, Badawī could only remark (to my mind, on quite arbitrary grounds) that he could not have been a Turk, despite the fact that the majority of manuscripts of the treatise were copied in Turkey. He also argued (correctly) that the author was well-versed in both Šūfī thought and the Greek and Arabic philosophical tradition, especially logic.<sup>6</sup> He praises the author’s philosophical acumen and his independence vis-à-vis the established schools of thought and draws an analogy between his Platonism and that of Hegel and Husserl.<sup>7</sup> In a recent study, John Walbridge conjectures that the author of the treatise is likely to have been a Persian and refers to him throughout as “Persian Platonist.”<sup>8</sup>

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354 (translation). A new two-page Arabic text on the Platonic Ideas has recently been discovered by Tzvi Langermann in MS Teheran, Majlis 16373. See [http://academic.mu.edu/taylorr/The\\_Abrahamic\\_Traditions/2012\\_Summer\\_Conference\\_Milwaukee.html](http://academic.mu.edu/taylorr/The_Abrahamic_Traditions/2012_Summer_Conference_Milwaukee.html). Further investigation would be needed to determine how this new text relates to the “Platonische Ideen in der arabischen Philosophie” tradition outlined by Arnzen.

<sup>4</sup> *Muthul*, 134:5. al-Qāshānī is an outstanding Šūfī theologian in the school of Ibn ‘Arabī, known especially for his glossary of Šūfī technical terms (al-Qāshānī / David Pendlebury [ed.] / Nabil Safwat [tr.], *A Glossary of Šūfī Technical Terms* (London, 1991) and for his widely-read commentary on Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam Sharḥ ‘alā Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam li-Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī* (Cairo, 1966 and other editions).

<sup>5</sup> *Muthul*, Introduction, 42-43. This manuscript has been used by Arnzen in his German translation of the treatise.

<sup>6</sup> *Muthul*, Introduction, 43-44.

<sup>7</sup> *Muthul*, Introduction, 44-46.

<sup>8</sup> John Walbridge, “The Background to Mullā Šadrā’s Doctrine of the Platonic Ideas”: “I will call the author ‘the Persian Platonist’ for convenience, since the subject, the authors cited, and the places where manuscripts are known to have been copied point to an author in the Iranian world, but, of course, I have no real knowledge of who he was.” This article was published in two collections: (1) *Islam-West Philosophical Dialogue: The Papers Presented at the World Congress*

Arnzen takes note of the important fact that a long section of the treatise corresponds verbatim to Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's (d. 710/1311) *Risāla fī taḥqīq 'ālam al-mithāl wa-ajwibat as'ilat ba'd al-fuḍalā'* (*An Epistle Establishing [the Existence of] the World of the Image and [Containing] Responses to One Excellent Man's<sup>9</sup> Questions*). He tentatively suggests that the anonymous author of the treatise might have been that "excellent man" himself, writing approximately two decades after al-Shīrāzī's death, or at any rate could have belonged to the circle of al-Shīrāzī's direct or indirect disciples.<sup>10</sup>

The treatise is addressed to a certain Abū Ṭālib, who was certainly a Shī'ite and, to judge from the honorifics used in the introduction, a descendent of 'Alī.<sup>11</sup> As Badawī notes, Gustav Flügel, in his edition of Ḥājji Khalīfa's *Kashf al-zunūn*, supplies the name of the addressee as a certain Quṭb al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, without giving his source for this information.<sup>12</sup> One should also note that the author refers on two occasions to his late teacher (*al-ustādh raḥimahū Llāh*), whom marginal notes in two manuscripts identify as Shams (or: Shams al-Milla) Muẓaffar.<sup>13</sup> I was unsuccessful in my attempts to identify these two individuals. Similarly, no identification is provided in Arnzen's study.

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*on Mullā Ṣadrā (May 1999, Tehran)* (Tehran: Ṣadrā Islamic Philosophy Research Institute, 2001-2005), vol. 2, 147-165; (2) *The Pakistan Philosophical Journal* 34-36 (1997-99 [published 2000]): 13-36. I am grateful to Prof. Walbridge for kindly sending me an electronic copy of his article. On Mullā Ṣadrā's teachings on the Platonic Ideas see also: Z. Mostafāvi, "Ṣadr-ol-Mota'allahin on Platonic Ideas," *Spektrum Iran* 14.2 (2001): 23-54; eadem, "Platonic Ideas in Mullā Ṣadrā's View," in: *Islam-West Philosophical Dialogue*, vol. 1, 357-384 (not seen).

<sup>9</sup> Or: *Some Excellent Men's*. The Arabic is ambiguous here.

<sup>10</sup> Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 175, 214-215.

<sup>11</sup> The name Abū Ṭālib (*Muthul*, 2:3 = Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 219; cf. *Muthul*, Introduction, 41-42) appears in only one of the four manuscripts on which Badawī's edition is based; strangely it appears in the nominative case where genitive is required. Other manuscripts of our treatise (especially the three Istanbul manuscripts) have to be consulted for additional information.

<sup>12</sup> Ḥājji Khalīfa / Gustav Flügel (ed.), *Lexicon bibliographicum et encyclopædicum*, vol. 3 (London, 1842), 438, No. 6325 (cf. apparatus: vol. 7, 744), referred to by Badawī in *Muthul*, Introduction, 41n2.

<sup>13</sup> *Muthul*, 70:12 (and nn. 1-2) and 135:5 (and n. 1); cf. Badawī's note in *Muthul*, Introduction, 43n1.



## 1. Analysis of the Treatise

The full title of the treatise is: *An Epistle on the Platonic Intellectual Ideas, the Imaginal Suspended Ideas, and Those Aspects of Some Sufi Authors' Monistic Doctrine That Are Supposed to Be Based on These (Risāla fī al-Muthul al-'aqlīya al-Aflātūnīya wa-l-mu'allaqa al-khayālīya wa-mā yuẓannu annahū mabnī 'alayhā min al-tawhīd al-mashhūr 'an ba'd al-Ṣūfīya)*.<sup>14</sup> In accordance with this title, the treatise is divided into three parts: the first part addresses the question of the Platonic Ideas; the second deals with the Suhrawardian so-called “Suspended Ideas” and the “World of the Image” (*‘ālam al-mithāl*);<sup>15</sup> finally, the third part deals with Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of “unity of existence” (*waḥdat al-wujūd*)<sup>16</sup> and in particular with the question of whether or not the Self-Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihī*)<sup>17</sup> is identical with absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). It addresses therefore the question of “Primacy of Existence” (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), which became important in later Arabic philosophy under the influence of Ibn ‘Arabī.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the third part of

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<sup>14</sup> *Muthul*, 1:7-8.

<sup>15</sup> For a short history of the belief in *‘ālam al-mithāl* see Fazlur Rahman, *Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī* (Karachi, 1968), 62-63 (with reference to the same author’s article “Dream, Imagination and *‘Ālam al-Mithāl*,” *Islamic Studies* 4.2 (1964): 167-180). See now also Hermann Landolt, “Les idées platoniciennes et le monde de l’image dans la pensée du Shaykh al-Ishrāq Yahyā al-Suhrawardī (ca. 1155-1191),” in: Daniel De Smet, Meryem Sebti, and Godefroid De Gallatāy (eds.), *Miroir et savoir: La transmission d’un thème platonicien, des Alexandrins à la philosophie arabo-musulmane* (Leuven, 2007), pp. 233-250.

<sup>16</sup> The term *waḥdat al-wujūd* was not used by Ibn ‘Arabī himself—see *EF*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. “*waḥdat al-shuhūd* [and *waḥdat al-wujūd*],” vol. 11, 37a ff. (William Chittick) with additional references.

<sup>17</sup> This term was used by Avicenna in his famous distinction between God as the “Self-Necessary Existent” (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihī*) and everything else as “existent necessary through another” (*wājib al-wujūd li-ghayrihī*).

<sup>18</sup> For the author’s view on this subject see especially *Muthul*, 129:6-130:11. The most prominent defender and expositor of the “Primacy of Existence” position was the famous seventeenth-century philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1641). To the best of my knowledge, the history of the identification, in Arabic metaphysical thought, of God with absolute existence has not yet been written. For a recent discussion of its origins see Cristina D’Ancona, “Pseudo-*Theology of Aristotle*, Chapter I: Structure and Composition,” *Oriens*, 36 (2001): 78-112, at 100-102; eadem, “La doctrine néoplatonicienne de l’être entre l’Antiquité tardive et le Moyen Âge: Le *Liber de causis* par rapport à ses sources,” *Recherches de*

the treatise makes several references to Platonic Ideas and takes into account the conclusions reached in the first part.<sup>19</sup>

In the first investigation of the first part of the treatise the author addresses the question of whether Ideas exist and what entities have Ideas. He starts with a distinction between “divine” (i.e. immaterial), mathematical, and natural (or physical) entities,<sup>20</sup> deals with eight objections (*shukūk*) pertaining to this distinction,<sup>21</sup> and finally provides his definition of “Idea”: “The doctrine affirming the existence of ‘Idea[s]’ is the doctrine that the material quiddity (*māhīya*) or [quiddity] multiplied within particulars in virtue of the multiplicity of [their respective] material substrates remains, in and of itself, abstract from them all.”<sup>22</sup> From this definition it follows immediately that only mathematical and natural entities can have Ideas: “divine” entities (e.g. the separate celestial intelligences) are immaterial by nature and hence are not “material quiddities.”

It is important to note how different this understanding of Ideas is from Plato’s. For Plato, Ideas are self-subsisting, perfect, immovable, and eternal entities through participation in which phenomenal objects and qualities (such as just, equal, etc.) become what they are. If anything, Ideas, in Plato’s understanding, truly deserve to be called “divine.”<sup>23</sup> For

*théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 59 (1992): 41-85, reprinted in the collection of her articles *Recherches sur le Liber de causis* (Paris, 1995), 121-153, esp. 140-141. In D’Ancona’s view, the merging, in the Arabic Neoplatonic tradition, of the One (which, according to Plotinus’ interpretation of Plato’s “Form of the Good,” is *epekeina tou einai*, “beyond being”) with Being itself / the first Being reflects the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius. See also Ulrich Rudolph, *Die Doxographie des Pseudo-Ammonios: Ein Beitrag zur neuplatonischen Überlieferung im Islam* (Stuttgart, 1989), 125; Gerhard Endress, *Proclus Arabus: Zwanzig Abschnitte aus der “Institutio Theologica” in arabischer Übersetzung* (Beirut, 1973), 206ff. (who also refers to Dionysius).

<sup>19</sup> *Muthul*, 120:8, 124:13, 125:4,18, 126:15-16, 136:14, 140:8,11-12, 141:10, 143:9. For a convenient layout of the structure of the treatise, see Amzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 215-216. For the treatise’s sources, see Amzen, 214-215.

<sup>20</sup> The threefold distinction of theoretical sciences into physics, mathematics, and metaphysics ultimately goes back to Aristotle, e.g. *Met.* E.1 1026a6-16. On the origin of this threefold division of theoretical philosophy see also P. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague, 1953), 53ff.

<sup>21</sup> Only the Third Objection is translated below.

<sup>22</sup> *Muthul*, 11:2-4.

<sup>23</sup> This epithet was common in late Antiquity (cf. n. 104 below). In the Arabic tradition, too, the adjective *ilāhīya* is sometimes added to Platonic Ideas: see e.g. (Pseudo)-Fārābī / F.M. Najjar and D. Mallet (eds. and trs.), *L’Harmonie entre les*

the author of our treatise, by contrast, Ideas and divine entities are clearly distinct: divine entities cannot have or be Ideas,<sup>24</sup> and conversely Ideas are not divine entities but rather natural and mathematical quiddities (e.g. “horse” or “triangle”) subsisting separately from any particular instantiation (i.e. any particular horse or triangle). As the author argues, the fact that natural and mathematical entities have Ideas implies that naturals and mathematical are twofold, and it is their own intelligible and immaterial aspect, subsisting separately—rather than a separate divine entity—that is called “Idea”:

Some of the ancients maintained that all mathematical and natural entities are divided into two [aspects]: one [aspect] being intelligible and eternal, the other, sensible and corruptible. Intellect apprehends only the eternal, but not the corruptible. They called<sup>25</sup> this separate intelligible [aspect] “Idea.”<sup>26</sup>

Thus, in our author’s understanding, the theory of Ideas amounts to the theory of the separate existence of universals. This becomes eminently clear if we consider the following passage with which the author closes the first investigation:

I say: Maintaining the existence of Ideas ... requires that every universal be in itself abstract from matter and its attachments, and not only that it exist within (*dimna*) the particulars, for [if this were the case] its existence would be accidental and the [particulars’] existence essential, but [in reality] this is the other way round.<sup>27</sup>

It is therefore a “peripateticized” theory of Ideas, which is not based directly on Plato but rather on Avicenna’s understanding of universals, without, of course, subscribing to the latter’s rejection of their separate and extra-mental existence.

The author then differentiates between four possibilities: [1] that both mathematical and naturals have Ideas, [2] that only mathematical or [3] only naturals have Ideas, and [4] that there are no Ideas at all. To these he adds two other—post-Avicennian—positions, one of which belongs to the

*opinions de Platon et d’Aristote* [Kitāb al-Jam‘ bayna ra’yay al-ḥakīmayn] (Damascus, 1999), §64, 141:11.

<sup>24</sup> But see n. 34 below.

<sup>25</sup> See n. 58 below.

<sup>26</sup> *Muthul*, 11:9-12.

<sup>27</sup> *Muthul*, 15:17-20.

“Master of Illumination” (al-Suhrawardī), and the other is his own. In what follows I would like to present the basic structure of this discussion.<sup>28</sup>

### I. Ancient Views

1. {p. 11:9-12} Mathematical and naturals have Ideas
2. {p. 11:12-20} Mathematical are principles of naturals,<sup>29</sup> therefore: Mathematical, but not naturals have Ideas
  - a. {pp. 11:20-12:3} [Only measures are principles of naturals,]<sup>30</sup> numbers are principles of measures,<sup>31</sup> therefore: Numbers, but not measures have Ideas
    - i. {p. 12:5-6} Measures do not admit of bifurcation<sup>32</sup>
    - ii. {p. 12:6-7} Measures admit of bifurcation
  - b. {p. 12:3-5} [Both numbers and measures are principles of naturals,] numbers are not principles of measures, therefore: Both numbers and measures have Ideas

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<sup>28</sup> Information given in [square] brackets is conjectural: it is required to distinguish clearly between the possibility 2.c on the one hand and the two other possibilities subsumed under 2—2.a and 2.b—on the other. Page references are given in {curly} brackets.

<sup>29</sup> The word “principles” is not used in this part of the text. What the author actually says is that naturals become mathematical when abstracted from matter. However, the omission of the term seems to be accidental; cf. *Ilāhīyāt*, 312:6, where the term is employed in this context. For a quotation from Pythagoras to the effect that numbers are principles of existents see the following references given by John Walbridge (*The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardī and the Heritage of the Greeks* (Albany, 2000), 243, n.54): al-Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri‘ wa-l-mu‘āraḥāt*, §185, vol. 1, 453:1-2; Hans Daiber, *Aëtius Arabus: Die Vorsokratiker in arabischer Überlieferung* (Wiesbaden, 1980), §I 3.8 (100 [text], 101 [translation], 337-338 [commentary, with additional references]); and cf. Walbridge, *loc. cit.*, 72-79 for a general discussion.

<sup>30</sup> This seems to be implied, for if numbers are principles of measures, then it would not make much sense if both numbers and measures were principles of naturals. Since however, according to 2, at least some mathematical are principles of naturals it must be the case that either [a] measures or [b] numbers are so. The latter possibility is considered under 2.c below. It seems to follow that here the former possibility is considered, namely that only measures are principles of naturals, numbers being principles of measures.

<sup>31</sup> The term “principle” for the relation between numbers and measures is employed a few lines later in the text: 12:6; cf. also *Ilāhīyāt*, 313:4; *Burhān*, 188:4.

<sup>32</sup> See n. 62 below.

- c. {p. 12:7-8} [Only] numbers are principles of naturals [and of measures],<sup>33</sup> [therefore: Only numbers have Ideas, as under 2.a above]  
 {p. 12:8-13} A variation of Position 2.c (or of Position 2 as a whole?) is ascribed to Pythagoras and his school; they maintain that numbers are principles of both naturals and measures but are *not* separate from matter. The author argues that this amounts to denying the existence of Ideas.
3. {p. 12:13-15} Naturals, but not mathematical have Ideas—Plato (mostly)
  4. {p. 12:15-16} Neither mathematical nor naturals have Ideas—Aristotle and his followers (including Avicenna)
- II. Modern (i.e. Post-Avicennian) Views
5. {pp. 12:17-13:5, continued 13:11-15:17} Only bodies have Ideas—al-Suhrawardī. The author argues that this amounts to denying the existence of Ideas.
  6. {p. 13:6-10} Every nature has its own Idea—the author himself<sup>34</sup>

This scheme is extremely important for understanding the structure of the first part of the treatise: after the first investigation, in which this scheme is laid out, investigations 2-7 of the first part proceed to deal systematically with possibilities 1-6, presenting arguments (*wujūh*) in favour of each position and discussing them critically. These sections should be consulted for a better understanding of each respective position.

The structure laid out by the author is largely based on Avicenna's doxographical account of the views of the ancients concerning Ideas and mathematical given in the Metaphysical part (*Ilāhīyāt*) of the *Book of the Cure* (Book VII, ch. 2), as well as on a (much shorter) discussion from the Logical part of this work (*Kitāb al-Burhān*, i.e. *Posterior Analytics*).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Although the author does not say so explicitly, it seems that according to this position, numbers are also principles of measures and not just of naturals. This is clear from the following section which seems to present a Pythagorean variation on this position: according to this variation, numbers are principles of both naturals and measures, but—and this is the only apparent difference that distinguishes this variation from 2.c—they are not regarded as being separate from matter.

<sup>34</sup> The author is even willing to acknowledge Ideas of divine entities, with the only proviso that these Ideas would be identical with the entities themselves—see *Muthul*, 13:7-8 and cf. n. 99 below.

<sup>35</sup> See also a brief reference to Platonic Ideas in *Ilāhīyāt*, 365:16. See Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 86-99; Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Critique of Platonists

However Avicenna's account is far from being systematic, and the author of our treatise has clearly subjected it to careful scrutiny so as to rearrange the information contained therein in an orderly fashion. The most significant correspondences between the discussion of Ideas in the first investigation of our treatise and Avicenna's accounts are listed below:

- Position 1 (and perhaps also Position 6, which is the author's elaboration upon Position 1)<sup>36</sup> corresponds to Avicenna's remark in *Burhān*, 188:4-6 (quoted by the author of our treatise in the Third Objection, *Muthul*, 7:10-12) that "Plato thought that every intelligible, including even naturals, has a separate intelligible Form"; however, Plato is not mentioned in the doxographical section of our treatise.
- For Position 2 two passages from Avicenna should be compared: *Ilāhīyāt*, 312:6-8 (in the variant reading *a'zāman wa-ashkālān wa-a'dādan* preserved in the apparatus) corresponds to *Muthul*, 11:15-16;<sup>37</sup> *Ilāhīyāt*, 311:10-13 (the Aristotelian example of snubness vs. concavity) corresponds to *Muthul*, 11:18-20.
- For the idea that measure is composed of units (affirmed in 2.a and rejected in 2.b) see *Ilāhīyāt*, 314:5-6 (and cf. 321:17-18) and *Burhān*, 188:4; for the idea that number is the principle of measure see *Ilāhīyāt*, 313:4 and *Burhān*, *ibid*.
- For the idea of bifurcation of measures<sup>38</sup> (rejected in 2.a.i and affirmed in 2.a.ii) see *Ilāhīyāt*, 314:5.
- For Position 2.c see *Ilāhīyāt*, 313:17-314:1 corresponding to *Muthul*, 12:7-8. Avicenna's description seems to refer to a group of the Pythagoreans; in our treatise no identification is provided.
- For the variation of Position 2.c (or of Position 2 as a whole?) see the following passages: *Ilāhīyāt*, 312:16-17 (attributed to the Pythagoreans in general) and 314:4 (attributed to the majority of the Pythagoreans); in our treatise this position is attributed to Pythagoras and his school.
- For Position 3 see *Ilāhīyāt*, 311:14-15 (referenced in *Muthul*, 12:15 and quoted in the Third Objection, *Muthul*, 7:13-15) and cf. also *Ilāhīyāt*, 314:2-3 (numbers hold an intermediate position between the Ideas and the naturals).

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in Book VII, Chapter 2 of the *Metaphysics of His Healing*," in: J.E. Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank* (Leuven, 2006), 355-369.

<sup>36</sup> Concerning Position 6 the author says that Avicenna did not distinguish it from Position 1, although he formulated it several times—*Muthul*, 82:3-4.

<sup>37</sup> One should note that the following section of Avicenna's discussion (312:8ff.) is the point of departure of *Muthul*, 46:11-12 (read *min* instead of '*an* at n. 2).

<sup>38</sup> See n. 62 below.

- Position 4 corresponds to Avicenna's refutation of the theories of Ideas and mathematical in *Ilāhīyāt*, 314:8ff.

Apart from the distinction between “divine” (i.e. immaterial), mathematical, and natural entities drawn at the beginning of the treatise, the author's arrangement of the various views seems to have been governed by yet another consideration. In his account of some views presented under Position he explained their proponents' rejection of the existence of Ideas of certain entities on the ground that these entities have principles (*mabādi'*) to which they are “reduced” when abstracted from matter. These principles are related to such entities in the same way Ideas are related to entities that have Ideas, but they are not Ideas themselves since they do not preserve the *nature* of these entities. The following passage is crucial for an understanding of the logic of this argument:

[Naturals do not have Ideas] because once bodily states are abstracted from matter, they become mathematical entities, for at that point they become magnitudes, shapes, and numbers. They are apprehended and become Ideas only by way of abstraction that strips them of their naturality and reduces them to their mathematicality. Therefore natural entities [as such] are neither intelligible nor Ideas; [rather] a natural form (*ṣūra*) arises when mathematical forms (*suwar*) are combined with matter, as [for instance] concavity: it is a mathematical entity (*ma'nā*), but when it is combined with matter, namely with [that of] a nose, it becomes a natural entity, namely snubness.<sup>39</sup>

According to this view, as presented by the author, naturals cannot have Ideas since they cannot be abstracted from matter *while remaining naturals*: this is because as soon as they are abstracted from matter they cease to be naturals and become mathematical. This explanation is only comprehensible if we remind ourselves of the author's understanding of Ideas: Ideas, say, of natural entities, are the separate aspects of these entities themselves; it is precisely because naturals can only be abstracted from matter on the condition of forfeiting their naturality that they cannot have Ideas.<sup>40</sup>

Having dealt with these four basic views concerning the Ideas of naturals and mathematical, the author turns to a long discussion of the version of the theory of Ideas propounded by al-Suhrawardī. He says

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<sup>39</sup> *Muthul*, 11:15-20.

<sup>40</sup> The author follows the same consideration on yet another occasion in his account. In his presentation of Positions 2.a and 2.b he argues that if numbers are principles of measures only numbers but not measures can have Ideas.

repeatedly that al-Suhrawardī's position is a mixture between affirming and denying the existence of Ideas, but upon verification it turns out to be tantamount to denying them.<sup>41</sup> This is because al-Suhrawardī understood Ideas not as quiddities existing separately from their material instantiations (indeed, for him quiddity can have only mental existence) but as separate intellects ("Lords of the idols") that are equally related to all members of a particular species. This theory fails to fulfil the basic requirement of our author's definition of Idea, namely that quiddity itself be separate from matter.

One may note again that the author's definition of Idea is based on Avicenna's discussion of Ideas and mathematical in the *Book of the Cure* and that he accepts precisely the same theory that Avicenna rejects. Variations of this theory, like the one put forward by al-Suhrawardī, in our author's view, only weaken it. This is made clear in the following two passages from the sixth investigation of the first part of the treatise:

The only reason why the proponent of the [fifth] view [i.e. al-Suhrawardī] was led to [putting] it [forward] is that he sympathized with those who affirmed Ideas, yet was unable to resolve the fallacies (*shubah*) of those who deny them. Therefore he combined the views [of both camps] in that he did not regard the quiddity of particulars as being separate, but considered the separate entity<sup>42</sup> to be like a part of their essences. It is only in this regard that his view is better than the view of the Peripatetics.<sup>43</sup> [...] In the interpretation of the Master of Illumination [al-Suhrawardī] ..., the doctrine concerning the existence of Ideas is extremely weak, but in the interpretation of those who affirmed their existence, as reported by the Shaykh [Avicenna], it is extremely powerful.<sup>44</sup>

Nor does the author accept al-Fārābī's (or Pseudo-Fārābī's) attempt to harmonize between the views of Plato and Aristotle in his *On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages (Kitāb al-Jam' bayna ra'yay al-ḥakīmayni)*.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Muthul*, 15:5-7,10-11; 76:10-12.

<sup>42</sup> I.e. the Lord of the idol.

<sup>43</sup> *Muthul*, 76:10-12.

<sup>44</sup> *Muthul*, 81:12-14.

<sup>45</sup> (Pseudo)-Fārābī, *L'Harmonie entre les opinions de Platon et d'Aristote*, §§63-70, 140-149. On this treatise and its authorship see now M. Rashed, "On the Authorship of the Treatise *On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages* attributed to al-Fārābī," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 19 (2009): 43-82. See also Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 67-71.



The shaykh Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī ... interpreted the Ideas as images of the Creator's ... knowledge (*al-ṣuwar al-'ilmīya allatī li-l-bāri'*), which are acknowledged by Aristotle [as well]. Thus, [he argued,] the controversy between [Aristotle] and Plato is resolved; and the moderns approved of his [method]. But this requires correction (*naẓar*), for [al-Fārābī] implies that the Creator's ... knowledge takes place through images, but this is impossible. Besides, Plato said that Ideas exist outside all faculties of apprehension [including the Creator's], not just outside our [human] intellects. So the aforementioned interpretation [by al-Fārābī] is a compromise that satisfies neither party.<sup>46</sup>

To summarize: despite the author's acceptance of the theory of Ideas rejected by Avicenna, Avicenna's profound influence on his thought is undeniable. It is apparent in the doxographical section of the treatise based on Avicenna's *Book of the Cure*, in the author's terminology throughout, in his definition of the concept of "Idea" which is based on Avicenna's understanding of universals, and in his rejection of two variations of the theory of Ideas put forward by al-Suhrawardī and (Pseudo)-Fārābī.<sup>47</sup>

### 1. Translation<sup>48</sup>

{p. 3} First Part—<On the Platonic Intellectual Ideas> [comprises] seven investigations.

{p. 5} First Investigation—On the Definition of the term "Idea" (*mithāl*) and Enumeration of the Views Concerning It. Its definition is preceded by an introduction that [treats of] the knowledge of divine (*ilāhīya*), mathematical (*ta'limīya*), and natural (*tabī'īya*) entities.

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<sup>46</sup> *Muthul*, 81:14-19.

<sup>47</sup> The reasons for the author's acceptance of the theory of Ideas rejected so vehemently by Avicenna require a separate study, in which investigations 2 and 5 treating of Positions 1 and 4 respectively should be carefully analyzed. See *Muthul*, 16-43 and 48-65 respectively.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. German tr. in Arzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 221-224, 228-234, who adduces important manuscript readings from MS Aya Sofya 2455.

**<Introduction>**

We say:<sup>49</sup> Some existents, not including our intentional actions,<sup>50</sup> are able to exist in the external reality (*fī l-khārij*) abstracted (*mujarradan*) from matter (*hayūlā*).<sup>51</sup> These are divine entities, and they are known [through] the divine science [i.e. metaphysics]. They fall into two groups. First, those whose existence in [matter] is impossible. These are abstract [entities] (*mujarradāt*), such as the Creator, the intelligences, and the separate souls. Second, those whose existence in [matter] is possible. These are universal entities (*al-umūr al-‘amma*).

Some [existents], such as measure, number, shape, man, horse, and others, cannot exist [in the external reality] abstracted from matter. These too fall into two groups. First, those which can be apprehended without apprehension of matter. These are mathematical entities, such as measure, number, and shape, and they are known [through] the mathematical science. Second, those which cannot be apprehended without apprehension of matter. These are natural entities, such as man, horse, and others, and they are known [through] the natural science.

One may distinguish between a mathematical entity and a natural entity by [saying] that the apprehension of a mathematical entity is in need of apprehension of some matter, but not of apprehension of any particular matter.<sup>52</sup> For instance, apprehension of a circle and a triangle is dependent on apprehension of matter, but not on apprehension of any particular matter, for they can be conceived of [as subsisting] in wood, iron, or other {p. 6} specific materials. Apprehension of a natural entity [by contrast] is in need of apprehension of a particular [kind of] matter, as, e.g., humanity, for it can be apprehended only [as subsisting] in a human body. Now, by

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. the answer to the Second Objection (*Muthul*, 6:17-7:9, not translated here), in which the whole passage is rephrased.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Muthul*, 7:8-9, as well as the author’s discussion of this restriction in his Fifth Objection, *Muthul*, 8:19-9:5 (not translated here). This exclusion of human actions seems to reflect the conventional distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy: only objects of theoretical philosophy (natural, mathematical, and abstract entities as the objects of physics, mathematics, and metaphysics respectively) are considered here; human actions, being the objects of practical philosophy (see e.g. Avicenna, *Shifā’*: *Mantiq*: *Madkhal*, beginning of Bk. 1, ch. 2, 12; Marmura, “Division of the Sciences,” 241), are excluded.

<sup>51</sup> The author uses the terms *hayūlā* and *mādda* interchangeably (except in the expression “Prime Matter” for which *al-hayūlā al-ūlā* is always used).

<sup>52</sup> This statement is not entirely accurate, for it applies to only one kind of mathematical: geometrical concepts, as noted in passing by Avicenna (*Ilāhīyāt*, 316:12-13). The following examples (circle and triangle) are all derived from geometry.

“matter” in this distinction they must mean matter of a bodily species, either particular or non-particular, regardless of whether this [matter] be primary or secondary, rather than prime matter (*al-hayūlā al-ūlā*) alone.

Here [several] objections (*shukūk*) can be raised. [...]

{p. 7} Third Objection: What the Shaykh [Avicenna] says in the *Posterior Analytics* (*burhān*) of the Logical [Part] of the *Book of the Cure*, [namely that] “Plato thought that every intelligible, including even naturals, has a separate intelligible Form (*al-šūra*)<sup>53</sup> and called these, when they are abstract, Ideas (*muthul*), and when they are combined with matter, natural forms,”<sup>54</sup> is at odds with what he says in his *Metaphysics* (*ilāhīyāt*) [of the *Book of the Cure*]: “Plato was mostly inclined to the [view] that it is the forms”—i.e. the natural [forms]—“that are separate; as for mathematical, they are in his view entities between the Forms”—i.e. the separate [Forms]—“and the material [entities].”<sup>55</sup> This is because the first statement implies that Plato maintained that there are Ideas of both mathematical and naturals, whereas the second statement implies that Plato maintained there are Ideas of naturals but not of mathematical, and [so] there is obvious contradiction between the two.

{p. 8} Response: Plato has [in fact] two statements: the first one is to the effect that Idea includes both mathematical and natural entities, while the second is to the effect that it applies only to natural but not to mathematical entities. This is why the Shaykh [Avicenna] said, when he transmitted the second opinion, that Plato “*mostly*” inclined to it, not that he exclusively inclined to it. [...]

{p. 11} [Now that] you know this, we say: The doctrine concerning the existence of Idea[s] is the doctrine that the material quiddity (*māhīya*) or [quiddity] multiplied within particulars in virtue of the multiplicity of [their respective] material substrates remains, in and of itself, abstract from them all. Thus, Idea[s], if they exist, apply to mathematical or natural entities, but not to divine existents.<sup>56</sup> They apply, therefore, either to both kinds of existents—mathematical and natural together—or only to one of them to the exclusion of the other, or to neither. There are therefore three possibilities, the second of which is further divided in two subdivisions:

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<sup>53</sup> Avicenna (see reference in n. 54 below) has: *al-šūwar*, but there is a manuscript reading noted in the apparatus that is identical with our text.

<sup>54</sup> This is an exact quotation from *Burhān*, ch. 2.10, 188:4-6 (except for the variant noted in n. 53 above).

<sup>55</sup> This is an exact quotation from *Ilāhīyāt*, ch. 7.2, 311:14-15; cf. n. 65 below.

<sup>56</sup> “Divine” (i.e. immaterial) existents cannot exist in matter and so do not fit the definition of “Idea.”

[according to] the first, Ideas apply to mathematical but not to natural [entities]; [according to] the second, vice versa. There are therefore four possibilities [in total], and each of them has been maintained by [a specific group of] people.

<1><sup>57</sup> Some of the ancients maintained that all mathematical and natural entities are divided into two [aspects]: one [aspect] being intelligible and eternal, the other, sensible and corruptible. Intellect apprehends only the eternal, but not the corruptible. They called<sup>58</sup> this separate intelligible [aspect] “Idea.”

<2> Others maintained that [only] every mathematical entity is divided into these two [aspects], but no natural entity is ever so divided, with the result that there are Ideas only of mathematical but not of naturals and that mathematical are intelligible, while naturals are not intelligible, since if they were intelligible they would be Ideas. [This is] because once bodily states are abstracted from matter, they become mathematical entities, for at that point they become magnitudes, shapes, and numbers. They are apprehended and become Ideas only by way of abstraction that strips them of their naturalness<sup>59</sup> and reduces them to their mathematicality. Therefore natural entities [as such] are neither intelligible nor Ideas. [Rather] a natural form (*ṣūra*) arises when mathematical forms (*ṣuwar*) are combined with matter, as [for instance] concavity: it is a mathematical entity (*ma'nā*), but when it is combined with matter, namely with [that of] a nose, it becomes a natural entity, namely snubness.<sup>60</sup>

<2.a> Thereupon some of them [construed] measure as composed {p. 12} of units<sup>61</sup> and maintained that measure arises from combination of number with matter and that number is separate from it. Consequently, they acknowledged [the existence of] Idea[s] of number but not those of measure, because measure would become number when it is abstracted from matter.

<sup>57</sup> Here and below paragraph numbers in angular brackets refer to the structure of the discussion as presented in the analytical section above.

<sup>58</sup> Read *sammā* for *summiya* (the singular is due to the subject being *ba'd al-qudamā'*—“some of the ancients”).

<sup>59</sup> Reading *li-ṭabī'iyatihā* instead of *li-ṭabī'atihā*; cf. Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 229n23.

<sup>60</sup> As Arnzen indicates (*Platonische Ideen*, 229n24), the last sentence is an almost verbatim quotation from *Ilāhīyāt*, ch. 7.2, 311:10-13.

<sup>61</sup> I.e. they considered measure to be discrete (divisible into “atoms” of length), rather than continuous. Consequently, any particular length would be a combination of a certain number (standing for the amount of discrete units) with matter.

<2.b> Others [however] did not [construe measure] as composed of units and considered [both] number and measure to be separate from matter. Consequently, they acknowledged [the existence of] Idea[s] of both number and measure, because [in their view] measure does not become number at the time when it is abstracted from [matter].

<2.a.i> Among the first group, some people considered measure not to be admitting of bifurcation (*tanṣīf*),<sup>62</sup> just as number, which [in their view] is the principle (*mabda'*) of measure, [does not admit of it].

<2.a.ii> Others considered it necessary [for measure] to admit of [bifurcation], despite<sup>63</sup> maintaining that [measure] is composed of number.

<2.c> Still others considered number to be the principle of natural forms, with the result that when it is abstracted from matter it is number, but when it is mixed with [matter] it is the form of [e.g.] man or horse.

<2.c, variation> As for those who considered number to be the principle [both] of measure and of natural forms but did not take it to be separate from matter—these being Pythagoras and his school (*tā'ifa*), as the Shaykh [Avicenna] says<sup>64</sup>—they do not acknowledge the existence of Ideas but rather deny their existence. The Peripatetics disagree with them only as far as the status [of number] as a principle (*mabda'īya*) is concerned, not with respect to the existence of Ideas, because both [groups] are united in denying the existence of Ideas. An investigation concerning the status of principle does not belong to our present examination of the existence of Ideas, so let us set aside what is not germane to our purpose.

<3> Another group maintained that [only] a natural entity, but not a mathematical entity, is divided into these two aspects: the eternal and intelligible and the corruptible and sensible. Plato was mostly inclined to this [view], as the Shaykh [Avicenna] relates.<sup>65</sup>

<4> The First Teacher [Aristotle] and his followers maintained that there are [Ideas] neither [of mathematical] nor [of natural]. Idea according to the second view and [Idea according] to the third view differ as two particulars (*akhaṣṣayni*) subsumed under a general [concept] (*a'amm*), this being Idea according to the first view.

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<sup>62</sup> This term is used by Avicenna (*Ilāhīyāt*, 314:5) but is not found in Goichon. It is likely that infinite divisibility is meant here. Arnzen translates literally (“Halbierung”), without providing an explanation.

<sup>63</sup> Arabic *ma'a*, which can also mean “with” or “in addition to.”

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Ilāhīyāt*, ch. 7.2, 312:16-17; cf. 314:4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ilāhīyāt*, ch. 7.2, 311:14; cf. n. 55 above.

<5> There remains yet a fifth view that appeared after the Shaykh [Avicenna]: it was put forward by the Master of Illumination [al-Suhrawardī], who was followed in this respect by the divinely-minded (*muta'alliha*)<sup>66</sup> among the moderns after him. According to this [view], there are Ideas only of bodies. Thus if [a certain class of] bodies constitutes a species, its separate Idea is an intelligible that is called its master (*ṣāhib*) and its lord (*rabb*) and the lord of the idol (*rabb al-ṣanam*).<sup>67</sup> This is the Platonic Idea (*al-mithāl al-aflāṭūnī*); {p. 13} it is an intellect ('*aql*) that belongs to the order of horizontal intellects (*al-'uqūl al-'arḍīya*)<sup>68</sup> situated, in terms of honour and abstraction from material substrates, above the order of souls and below the order of vertical intellects (*al-'uqūl al-tūlīya*).<sup>68</sup> It causes (*fā'il*) the species to exist, takes care of it, preserves it, and defends it. The species relates to it as a shadow, imprint (*rasm*), and reflection ('*aks*). If [however this body] is an individual (*shakhṣ*), its separate Idea is an imaginal [entity] (*mutakhayyal*). This is a Suspended Idea (*al-mithāl al-mu'allaq*) and an imaginal phantom (*al-shabaḥ al-khayālī*); it is situated, in terms of honour and abstraction from material substrates, below the world of soul and above the world of sense.<sup>69</sup>

<6> I say: Idea does not characterize<sup>70</sup> [only some] nature[s] to the exclusion of other[s]. Rather the nature of every existent is abstract from matter and is a luminous [i.e. Platonic] Idea corresponding (*muṭābiq*) to its individuals. For a reality (*ḥaqīqa*) that can exist only abstracted from matter, Idea is identical with [its] image (*mumaththil*). For a reality that can exist both abstracted from matter and conjoined to it, Idea is the first

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<sup>66</sup> According to al-Bīrūnī (E. Sachau [ed.], *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, London, 1887, ch. 3, 17:20-18:2), the term *ta'alluh* is rejected by Islam and by speakers of Arabic. However, this term became popular in later Arabic thought, especially due to the influence of al-Suhrawardī who used it in the meaning of “intuitive philosophy,” as opposed to “discursive philosophy” (*baḥth*) (see especially the introduction to his *Ishrāq*, §§5-6, 3:4ff.).

<sup>67</sup> Does this Suhrawardian term stand for the Greek *archetypon*? In the *Theology of Aristotle*, 119:6-7, 9 [~*Enn.* V 8, §12, ll. 15, 19, 406] *archetypon* is rendered as *al-shay' al-mutaqaddim alladhī huwa ṣanam lahū* and *al-shay' alladhī hiya ṣanam lahū*. This is an awkward expression and *rabb al-ṣanam* might be an attempt to recast it in plain Arabic.

<sup>68</sup> On this term cf. *Ishrāq*, §183, 119.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Walbridge's translation of this paragraph in his article [referenced in n. 8 above].

<sup>70</sup> The context requires that the verb be taken in the active voice.

individual in which it exists and subsists (*taqa'ū*). You shall hear an additional explanation of this [issue] in the third section [of this treatise].<sup>71</sup> This is the sixth view, which originates from the first.

<5, continued> Qualities of bodies are qualities of their Ideas in the world of the intellect, just as they are qualities of the things themselves (*a'yān*) in the world of sense. The subsistence (*qiyām*) of these [qualities] in the [Ideas] is real (*ḥaqīqī*)<sup>72</sup> in both worlds of Ideas.<sup>73</sup>

Some think (*wa-qīla*) that it is possible for their subsistence in the [Ideas] in the world of Suspended Idea[s] to be imaginable, not real. This can have two interpretations. The first: that the Idea of a quality does not exist at all, either in itself or in another, but it is imagined that it exists in another.<sup>74</sup> The second: that the Idea of [a quality] exists in itself, but [even though] it subsists in its essence it can be imagined that it subsists in another.<sup>75</sup> Thus, [even though] the Suspended Idea of a quality is an essence it can be imagined that it is a quality in the world of Suspended Idea[s]. [On the other hand, the Idea of a quality] may be imagined not [as] a quality [existing] there, but as it is in itself [i.e. as an essence]. To this [class belongs] materialization (*tajassud*) of actions.<sup>76</sup>

The relation between an individual body and its imaginal Idea is more obvious than that between a species body and its intellectual Idea, [for] the [former] is like the similarity between an image that you observe in the mirror and its source (*ṣāhibihā*).

If you say: Does the homonymy {p. 14} of [the term] Idea across the two [kinds of] Ideas<sup>77</sup> exist in meaning (*ma'nawī*) or [only] in wording

<sup>71</sup> I was unable to trace this reference.

<sup>72</sup> As opposed to mental (*dhihnī*), conceptual (*i'tibārī*), or (the term actually used by the author below) imaginal (*takhyīlī*).

<sup>73</sup> I.e. in the world of Platonic Ideas and in the world of Suspended Ideas.

<sup>74</sup> I.e. in the Suspended Idea of the corresponding body.

<sup>75</sup> I.e. in the Suspended Idea of the corresponding body. Here, as Arnzen notices (*Platonische Ideen*, 231), MS Aya Sofya 2455, adds a sentence which is subsequently deleted: "The first interpretation cannot be meant here, because this would necessitate that a quality have no Suspended Idea at all; rather, it is the second interpretation that is meant."

<sup>76</sup> On "materialization of actions" see references to Farghānī and Ibn 'Arabī, provided by Arnzen (*Platonische Ideen*, 232n32). Arnzen also points out that here again a sentence is added, and then deleted in MS Aya Sofya 2455: "Individual parts of a body have Ideas which are parts of the Idea of that body in the world of Suspended Ideas, but not in the world of Platonic Ideas."

<sup>77</sup> I.e. to the Platonic Ideas and the Suspended Ideas.

(*lafẓī*)?<sup>78</sup>—I shall say: It exists in meaning, for Idea in the absolute sense (*muṭlaqan*)<sup>79</sup> is that which exists outside the body or the bodily species or individual, subsists in itself, has no position (*wadʿ*), is abstracted from all material substrates and bodies, and corresponds to this body or bodily [species or individual]. [This correspondence] means: either [1] that the abstract [Idea], should it be conjoined with matter, would become this very material [entity] and that [conversely] the material [entity], should it be separated from [matter], would become this very abstract [Idea]; or [2] that the material [entity] has a separate [entity] that resembles it<sup>80</sup> in some way (*yushābihuhū nawʿan min al-mushābaha*).<sup>81</sup>

This meaning is common to intellectual [i.e. Platonic] Idea[s] and imaginal [i.e. Suspended] Idea[s], as well as Idea[s] subsisting in themselves and Idea[s] subsisting in another.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, each of the images (*ṣuwar*) of one individual, e.g. of Zayd, that are seen in many mirrors can be called Zayd only because images of Zayd arising in our imagination [when we see the mirror images] correspond to his Suspended Idea, without any distinction between the [two],<sup>83</sup> except that one of them subsists in the imagination while the other<sup>84</sup> subsists in itself in external [reality]. [Similarly] the image of a species that arises in the intellect corresponds to its Platonic Idea, there being, similarly, no difference between these two, except that one of them exists in the intellect while the other<sup>85</sup> exists in the external [reality]. This correspondence is the reason why the Idea of the species is common to [all] individuals of that species.

Among the two [kinds of Ideas],<sup>86</sup> the intellect apprehends only this luminous [i.e. Platonic] Idea, which is either [1] the quiddity of a species, according to the commonly held opinion, or [2] something resembling it (*mushābihuhū*), according to the opinion of the Master of Illumination [al-Suhrawardī]. For he thought that there was a consensus (*ijmāʿ*) among the

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<sup>78</sup> In other words: does the term “Idea” apply to the two kinds of Idea univocally or equivocally?

<sup>79</sup> I.e. prior to the distinction between Platonic Ideas and Suspended Ideas.

<sup>80</sup> It is possible to understand here: “that it resembles,” but the word *mushābihuhū* in a similar context below (*Muthul*, 14:15) precludes this interpretation.

<sup>81</sup> As the author makes clear below, the first possibility represents the commonly held opinion, whereas the second possibility is the opinion held by al-Suhrawardī.

<sup>82</sup> I.e. Ideas of substances and Ideas of accidents.

<sup>83</sup> One should read *baynahumā* instead of *baynahā*.

<sup>84</sup> I.e. the Suspended Idea.

<sup>85</sup> I.e. the Platonic Idea.

<sup>86</sup> See n. 77 above.



prophets, the pillars among the sages (*asāṭīn al-ḥukamāʾ*),<sup>87</sup> and the Ṣūfī shaykhs that there exist two worlds of Ideas. He interpreted their<sup>88</sup> saying “The lord of a species (*rabb al-nawʿ*) is the universal (*kullī*) of that species” to mean that the lord of a species relates equally to all individuals of this species by taking care of them and constantly emanating (*faḡd*) upon them. [He rejected the alternative interpretation] that [the lord of a species] is common (*mushtarak*)<sup>89</sup> to the [individuals of this species],<sup>90</sup> for [in his view] how can an intelligent person claim that an abstract [entity] exists in many bits of matter and in countless material individuals!<sup>91</sup> In other words [the lord of a species] is, as it were, truly universal and primary (*aṣli*), whereas the material species is [its] branch and mould (*farʿ wa-qālab*). Species, with the variety of their members, distinction of their plans {p. 15} and positions, and variegation of their impressions (*nuqūsh*),<sup>92</sup> imitate (*taḡdhū ḡadhwa*) their luminous [i.e. Platonic] Ideas. The Ideas of essences (*dhawāt*) know the qualities [of these essences] by their Ideas, and [so] they are, in this respect (*iʿtibār*),

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Ishrāq*, §165, 107:20 (*al-anbiyāʾ wa-asāṭīn al-ḡikma*), 108:4 (*asāṭīn al-ḡikma wa-l-nubūwa*); Ṣūfī shaykhs are not mentioned by al-Suhrawardī in this context. The expression *asāṭīn al-ḡikma* probably has its origin in the doxography of Pseudo-Ammonius (Rudolph, *Die Doxographie des Pseudo-Ammonios*, §§XI, 1 [45:2] and XIII, 1 [48:17-49:1]), where it refers to the seven Greek sages. As noted by Everett Rowson (*A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and Its Fate: al-ʿĀmirī’s Kitāb al-Amad ʿalā l-abad* (New Haven, 1988, 204), who refers to al-Shahrastānī / W. Cureton (ed.), *al-Milal wa-l-niḡal*, London, 1846, 253, the expression “seven pillars of wisdom” reflects Christian influence, for it must ultimately depend on Prov. 9:1. I have found in the *TLG* no example of this expression used with reference to the seven Greek sages. Furthermore, Pseudo-Ammonius’ most important source—Hippolyte of Rome’s *Refutatio omnium haeresium*—uses the standard *hoi hepta sophoi* and does not employ this expression (cf. quotations in Rudolph, *loc. cit.*, 87, 90). Is, then, this expression in the Arabic Pseudo-Ammonius due to the Christian translator and adapter of this doxography, who was familiar with Prov. 9:1 and thought it appropriate to substitute this expression for the Greek *hoi hepta sophoi*) rather than to a relatively obscure Greek source?

<sup>88</sup> The pronominal suffix seems to refer to prophets, pillars among the sages, and Ṣūfī shaykhs without discrimination. The following statement could not be identified.

<sup>89</sup> I.e. universal.

<sup>90</sup> Reading *baynahā* instead of *baynahumā*; cf. Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, p. 233n35.

<sup>91</sup> The reference is to al-Suhrawardī’s discussion in *Ishrāq*, §167, 108.

<sup>92</sup> Badawī gives a variant reading *nufūs*.

knowledges. So if you say: Member, plan, position, and impression (*naqsh*)<sup>93</sup> belong to the individual, not to the species—I shall say: These [qualities'] individual instances [indeed] do not belong to the species but to its individuals; their quiddity however does belong to the [species]. Subsistence of a species in bodily matter is due to its deficiency in itself, whereas subsistence of its luminous [i.e. Platonic] Idea in itself is due to it being perfect in its substance.

This [i.e. al-Suhrawardī's] opinion amounts in fact to denying the existence of Ideas, for it is a [re-]interpretation of the position of those who affirm them in accordance with the principles of those who deny them. [For] even those who deny [the existence of Ideas] acknowledge their existence according to this interpretation (*ma'nā*): they deny their existence only according to the commonly held interpretation, namely that entities involving multiplicity (*mutakaththira*) subsist abstracted from multiplicity and from intellectual conceptions (*taṣawwurāt*). Indeed, all Peripatetic and Illuminationist philosophers maintain<sup>94</sup> that the intelligible is related to [its] producer (*fā'il*)<sup>95</sup> as the image seen in a mirror relates to its source. This is, in a sense, a combination between the views of those who affirm and those who deny [the existence of Ideas], but upon verification this turns out to be a denial of the existence of Ideas.

It is incorrect to argue: There is no alternative to interpreting the saying of the ancients<sup>96</sup> according to the view of the Master of Illumination [al-Suhrawardī], for it is only because they are different in their concomitants (*lawāzim*) that a separate [entity] can be said to be the *Idea* (*mithāl*) of a material [entity], rather than [completely] *identical* (*mithl*) with it. This is because we shall answer: The separate [entity] here is the quiddity of the material [entity]. Quiddity and individual are different from one another in their concomitants (for quiddity is universal, whereas individual is particular) despite their being united in quiddity. And should one say [in support of al-Suhrawardī's view]: Every concomitant of a quiddity is a concomitant of an individual [and hence a quiddity cannot be an Idea],—we shall say: This works only on the level of the actualization [of the quiddity], but not

<sup>93</sup> Here too Badawī gives a variant reading *nafs*.

<sup>94</sup> The word *yaqūlūna* is missing in Badawī's edition, but is supplied by Arnzen (*Platonische Ideen*, 234n37) from MS Aya Sofya 2455.

<sup>95</sup> I.e. to its real source, from which the intelligible has been abstracted.

<sup>96</sup> Namely the saying quoted above (*Muthul*, 14:17) on the authority of prophets, pillars among the sages, and Sūfī shaykhs that "The lord of a species (*rabb al-naw'*) is the universal (*kullī*) of this species."

on the level of predication because of the barrenness (*'uqm*) of the first-figure [syllogism] when the major premise is indefinite (*muhmala*).<sup>97</sup>

I say: Maintaining the existence of Ideas, as shall become clear in the course of examining the arguments (*adilla*) of those who affirm them,<sup>98</sup> requires that every universal be in itself abstract from matter and its attachments, and not only that it exist within (*dimna*) the particulars, for [if this were the case] its existence would be accidental and their existence—essential, but [in reality] this is the other way round.<sup>99</sup>

### Appendix: *Mithāl*—a brief terminological study<sup>100</sup>

The author of our treatise uses the term *mithāl* (pl. *muthul*) for Platonic Ideas. In Modern Standard Arabic this usage is common, and it has given

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<sup>97</sup> This term means that the subject of this proposition is general, but there is no quantifier used to indicate this (e.g. “Man is an animal,” as opposed to the corresponding definite proposition “Every man is an animal,” the term for “definite” being *maḥṣūra*, and the term for quantifier being *sūr*)—see Goichon, s.vv. “*sūr*,” No. 301, 153f., “*qaḍīya maḥṣūra*,” No. 586.9, 309, and “*qaḍīya muhmala*,” No. 586.32, 317. For the term *sūr* cf. D.M. Dunlop, “Al-Fārābī’s Paraphrase of the *Categories* of Aristotle,” *Islamic Quarterly*, 4 (1957-58): 168-197 and 5 (1959): 21-54, at 45, n. 3 of the second part. The author’s argument here is somewhat obscure. Perhaps he means that the reason a first-figure syllogism with an indefinite major premise is barren (i.e. does not produce the desired conclusion) is that the indefinite middle term is ambiguous insofar as it can stand for all the individuals of a species or for the quiddity of that species. From the fact of this ambiguity, it follows that contrary to the opponent’s view, on the level of predication not every concomitant of a quiddity is a concomitant of an individual. For a similar expression see *Muthul*, 127:14 (cf. also 128:2-3, 133:12-13).

<sup>98</sup> See Part 1, Investigation 2 of the treatise, *Muthul*, 16-43.

<sup>99</sup> Here again, Arnzen (*Platonische Ideen*, 234n38) supplies a passage added and then deleted in MS Aya Sofya 2455: “In this sense, it would be possible for a divine [i.e. immaterial] entity, too, to have an Idea; however, [those philosophers who affirm Ideas] have limited the existence of Ideas to mathematical and natural [entities] for the following reason. If the divine [i.e. immaterial] nature happens to be an entity separate [from matter], it exists in external reality on its own, having, in its essence, no need for any supplementary aspect to be added to it. Therefore, it would be a purely luminous idea of itself. If, by contrast, [this divine nature] is a universal concept, it would be followed [i.e. partaken by] at random (*bi-l-ittifāq*) both by what is separate from matter and by what is connected with [matter].” Arnzen’s translation of the concluding section of this passage is problematic.

<sup>100</sup> For a more extensive study of the history of the term (and the concept of Platonic Ideas generally), see Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 1-118, esp. 1-53 for a useful survey of the terminology of Graeco-Arabic translation literature.

rise to loan translations of related terms from European languages, such as *mithāl a'lā*—"ideal" (noun); *mithālī*—"ideal" (adj.) and "idealist" (also as a philosophical term), *mithālīya*—"idealism," etc. In this appendix I would like to call attention (1) to the origin of the term *mithāl* in the meaning of "Platonic Idea"; (2) to other Arabic terms used to render this concept; and (3) to other meanings of the term *mithāl* in Arabic translations from the Greek and in Arabic philosophical and semi-philosophical literature.

The most likely source for the term *mithāl* in the meaning of "Platonic Idea" is Uṣṭāth's version of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where it stands for the Greek *idea* (the kindred term *eidos* is usually rendered by *ṣūra*).<sup>101</sup> In one passage from the *Theology of Aristotle* the Greek *ideaī* are also rendered by *muthul*.<sup>102</sup> Significantly, the term *muthul* is immediately glossed by *ṣuwar*—a term that is used in the *Theology* more frequently to refer to Platonic Ideas, especially in passages that have no correspondence in the Greek text.<sup>103</sup> In at least some early translations, the term *mithāl* may stand

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<sup>101</sup> Uṣṭāth's translation of the *Metaphysics* originally included Books α and B-M (Books K and M are no longer extant). For *idea* ~ *mithāl* in Uṣṭāth's version—a usage neglected by Arnzen—see, e.g., Averroès [Ibn Rushd] / M. Bouyges (ed.), *Tafsīr mā ba'd aṭ-ṭabī'at* [sic!], 4 vols. (Beirut, 1938-48), vol. 2, 975:10 [*al-ṣuwar ya'nī al-muthul* ~ *tas ideas*, *Met.* Z.14, 1039a25], 978:13 [Z.14, 1039b12], 983:13 [Z.15, 1040a8-9], 992:5, 6, 9 [Z.15, 1040a22, 24, 27], vol. 3, 1639:14-1640:1 [Λ.8, 1073a17, 19]. (In book Z Ibn Rushd uses Uṣṭāth's version throughout; in book Λ he reverts to Uṣṭāth's version for 1072b16-1073a13—see F.E. Peters, *Aristoteles Arabus: The Oriental Translations and Commentaries on the Aristotelian Corpus* (Leiden, 1968), 49-50; Amos Bertolacci, "On the Arabic Translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15 (2005): 241-275, esp. 251.)

<sup>102</sup> *Theology*, 159:15 corresponding to *Enn.* V 8, §5, l. 24, 390: *tas ideas*. This is the only occurrence in the *Theology* of the term *mithāl* in the meaning "Platonic Idea" that I was able to find (for another meaning of the term *mithāl* see n. 111 below, and cf. n. 110 below). Lewis, in his English translation of this passage of the *Theology* (*Enn.*, 391), mistakenly takes the gloss *ṣuwar* rather than *muthul* as the translation of *tas ideas*.

<sup>103</sup> See the expression *al-ṣuwar al-ilāhīya* in *Theology*, 6:14 (part of the introduction, which has no correspondence in the Greek text); in 147:11 too *ṣūra* clearly means Platonic Idea [~*Enn.* VI 7, §8, l. 4, 452: *noēsīn*]. It is possible that *muthul* and *ṣuwar* parts of the *Theology* represent two different layers of the text: the earlier layer of the translation *sensu stricto*, and the layer of the adaptation. A careful terminological analysis is needed in order to establish or disprove this.

for the Greek *eidos* rather than *idea*.<sup>104</sup> It should be noted in this context that al-Kindī, in his treatise *On First Philosophy*, seems to use the term *mithāl* in the meaning of the Aristotelian *eidos*.<sup>105</sup>

The terms *muthul* and *ṣuwar* for Platonic Ideas are used more or less interchangeably in (Pseudo)-Fārābī's *Kitāb Jam' ra'yay al-ḥakīmāyn*<sup>106</sup> and in Avicenna's discussions of Platonic Ideas.<sup>107</sup> In other early sources the term *ṣuwar* seems to be predominant: one may mention, e.g., the doxography *Placita Philosophorum* translated by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā.<sup>108</sup> Only in later sources, from al-Suhrawardī onwards, did the term *mithāl* for Platonic Ideas become standard, but it never replaced the term *ṣūra* completely.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>104</sup> In Ibn al-Bīṭrīq's translation (translation B) of the *De caelo*, 278a16 *eidos* is rendered by the hendiadys *mithāl wa-qālab*—see Endress, *Proclus Arabus*, 135. One may add that the expression *muthul ilāhīya* which (Pseudo)-Fārābī ascribes to Plato (see reference in n. 23 above) is more likely to stand for *theia eidē* than for *theiai ideai*: a brief search in the *TLG* shows that the former expression is not uncommon in late Hellenistic philosophy, whereas the latter is hardly attested at all.

<sup>105</sup> See al-Kindī / R. Rashed and J. Jolivet (eds. and trs.), *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindī*, vol. 2: "Métaphysique et cosmologie," (Leiden, Boston and Köln, 1998), ch. 4, 87:23,25,26, 89:4,8, 91:7 and Glossaire arabe-français, 219, s.v. *mithāl*; cf. also the editors' note on 109 (ad n. 74) to the effect that al-Kindī's usage of the term *mithāl* is unrelated to Platonic Ideas.

<sup>106</sup> See n. 45 above.

<sup>107</sup> See references and discussion above. In his *Commentary on the Theology of Aristotle*, ed. Badawī, 50:15-16 Avicenna uses *al-ṣuwar al-aflātūnīya*. See also Isfizārī's discussion of Platonic Ideas in his *Kitāb fī Masā'il al-umūr al-ilāhīya*, in Daniel Gimaret, "Un traité théologique du philosophe musulman Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfizārī," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 50.1 (1984): 210-252, §20, 238; for two additional passages from Isfizārī, see Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 6.

<sup>108</sup> Daiber, *Aëtius Arabus* uses *ṣūra* for *idea* (§§1 10.1-10.5, 122 [text] / 123 [translation], see esp. l. 19, where *anwā'* stands for *eidē*, and *ṣuwar* for *ideai*); see also Arnzen, *Platonische Ideen*, 6-8. The translation *mithāl* is used for *eidōlon*, *paradeigma*, and rarely also for *eikōn* and *charaktēr*; *lā mithāla (lahū)* renders *aneideos*.

<sup>109</sup> One should also note Ibn 'Arabī's term *al-a'yān al-thābita* ("fixed entities") which comes close in meaning to Platonic Ideas. On this term see William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Cosmology*, (Albany, 1998), Index, 462b, s.v. "entity ('ayn): fixed"; and cf. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1984), pt. I, ch. XII: "Permanent Archetypes," 159-196; idem, *The Concept and Reality of Existence* (Tokyo, 1971), 104, n. 89.

The term *mithāl* is also used in the Graeco-Arabic translation literature to render several other Greek concepts. The most important ones are *paradeigma*<sup>110</sup> and *eikōn*.<sup>111</sup> The term *paradeigma* comes close in meaning to Platonic Idea, since, in some of his dialogues, Plato argued that Ideas are paradigms of objects in the phenomenal world. The term *eikōn* however, confusingly enough, represents the opposite relation: it is the objects in the phenomenal world that are *eikones* (“images”) of the Ideas.

*Mithāl* in the meaning of *eikōn* is very frequent in Arabic literature. One can mention, e.g., al-Ghazālī’s quasi-Platonic theory, influenced by the *Theology of Aristotle*, that objects in the lower physical world (termed ‘*ālam al-mulk wa-l-shahāda*) are images and reflections of the upper spiritual world (‘*ālam al-ghayb wa-l-malakūt*).<sup>112</sup>

There is some evidence that the term *mithāl* can also correspond to the Greek *symbolon*. This has been shown by Richard Walzer in his analysis

<sup>110</sup> Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn uses *mithāl* to translate *paradeigma* in Proclus’ *De Aeternitate mundi* (‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī [ed.], *al-Aflātūniya al-muḥdatha ‘ind al-‘arab* (Cairo, 1955), 34-42), argument 2, 35:9-17 (*mumaththil* [in Badawī’s edition vocalized *mumaththal*] is used several times in the same passage to render *eikōn*) (for the Greek text see Proclus / Helen S. Lang and A.D. Macro [eds. and trs.], *On the Eternity of the World [De Aeternitate Mundi]* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2001, 40); this translation for *paradeigma* is used by Ishāq also in his translation of Themistius, *In De an.* (M.C. Lyons [ed.], *An Arabic Translation of Themistius[’] Commentary on Aristoteles [sic!] De anima* (Columbia, SC, 1973), 13:15, 105:6). For a related discussion of the *mithāl* ~ *paradeigma* correspondence cf. also Rudolph, *Die Doxographie des Pseudo-Ammonios*, 129-130.

<sup>111</sup> The hendiadys *mithāl wa-ṣanam* (or *ṣanam wa-mithāl*) renders *eikōn* in the *Theology*, 119:5, 8 [~*Enn.* V 8, §12, ll. 13, 19, 406], but at least once stands for *paradeigma*, *Theology*, 93:9 [~*Enn.* VI 7, §12, l. 2, 464]; *mithāl* separately (along with other translations) is used for *eikōn* by Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn: Lyons, *An Arabic Translation of Themistius[’] Commentary* 69:5, 199:10.

<sup>112</sup> See e.g. al-Ghazālī / David Buchman (ed. and tr.), *The Niche of Lights* (Provo, UT, 1998), ch. 2, §9, 27:7 and other texts quoted in Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali* (Jerusalem, 1975), Appendix C: “Cosmology,” 503-522; cf. F. Jabre, *Essai sur le lexique de Ghazali* (Beirut, 1970), s.v. *mithāl*, 255-256. For the influence of the *Theology of Aristotle* on al-Ghazālī cf. A.J. Wensinck, “On the Relation between Ghazālī’s Cosmology and His Mysticism,” in: *Mededeelingen der koninklijke akademie van wetenschappen*, Afdeeling Letterkunde, Deel 75, Serie A, No. 6 (Amsterdam, 1933), 183-209. For a similar concept in the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-ṣafā’* see Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī (ed.), *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-ṣafā’ wa-khillān al-wafā’*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1928), vol. 2, 120:15, 122:9 (read *amthila* instead of *mithlahū*).

of the use of the term *mithāl* in Chapter 17 of al-Fārābī's *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*.<sup>113</sup> However Walzer's argument is based solely on a comparison between al-Fārābī and a variety of Greek texts; he provides no concrete examples from the translation literature for cases where the Greek *symbolon* was actually rendered by *mithāl*. This question is therefore in need of further investigation.<sup>114</sup> The term *mithāl*, in the meaning of "symbol" or "image," appears also, possibly under al-Fārābī's influence, in al-Bīrūnī's and Maimonides' discussions of idolatry: both authors attribute to idolaters the view that idols are symbolic representations of God.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Richard Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's "Mabādi' Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila,"* (Oxford, 1985), 441, 474-481 and al-Fārābī's text, ch. 17, §2-6, 278-285. Al-Fārābī's views are connected to his theory of the representative faculty "imitating" or "expressing in images" (*muḥākāt*) whatever comes within its reach (Walzer, *loc. cit.*, 416-417 and al-Fārābī's text, ch. 14, §1-2, 210-213).

<sup>114</sup> One possible example of the *symbolon* ~ *mithāl* correspondence can be found in Ibn al-Ṭayyib / Neil Linley (ed.), *Proclus' Commentary on the Pythagorean Golden Verses* (Buffalo, NY, 1984), 76:9: "Pythagoras made numbers ideas and symbols [*muthulan wa-rumūzan*, hendiadys for *symbola*?] for divine entities." Interestingly, we have a close correspondence to this report in the Greek tradition: Asclepius reports that his teacher (and a student of Proclus) Ammonius Hermiae said that Platonists "symbolically [*symbolikōs*] understood the Ideas as numbers" (Ammonius Hermiae / M. Hayduck [ed.], *In Metaph.*, [*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, 6.2 (Berlin, 1888)], 92:29ff., ad *Met.* A.9, 991b9-10, referenced by Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*, 479, n. 912, who however ascribes this saying to Asclepius himself rather than Ammonius).

<sup>115</sup> Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, ch. 11, 53:13; cf. 59:14-17 on the Pagan attitude to idol worship; Maimonides / I. Joel (ed.), *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, Jerusalem, 5691/1929, Part I, ch. 36, 56:23-24. On al-Fārābī's influence on al-Bīrūnī see Richard Walzer, "Al-Biruni and Idolatry," in: *Hommage universel* [= *Acta Iranica*, Première Série: "Commémoration Cyrus"], Teheran, Liège, and Leiden, vol. III, 317-323; on al-Fārābī's influence on Maimonides see L.V. Berman, "Maimonides, The Disciple of al-Fārābī," *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974): 154-178.