Amos Bertolacci

AVICENNA AND AVERROES
ON THE PROOF OF GOD'S EXISTENCE
AND THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF METAPHYSICS*

Which philosophical discipline, according to Aristotle, proves God's existence, physics or metaphysics? The answer to this question is crucial for the overall structure of the system of knowledge: if physics provides the proof in question and transmits it to metaphysics, any hierarchy in the classification of the sciences seems excluded, since a supposedly "lower" discipline provides to a supposedly "higher" science a fundamental tenet; if, on the other hand, metaphysics is able to construe the proof on its own, its independence from, and superiority to, physics and the other particular disciplines appears to be better guaranteed.

It is well-known that the two most important Arab interpreters of Aristotle disagree in the answer to the aforementioned question: Avicenna (Ibn Sina, d. 1037) assigns clearly and coherently the proof of God's existence to metaphysics, whereas Averroes

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proof of God's existence as based on the consideration of the necessity and contingency of existence is not always true, since it does not apply to the Ilahiyyat; likewise, the topos depicting Averroes as an advocate of a theological, rather than ontological, view of the subject-matter of metaphysics, is partially false: it is falsified not only by the Epitome of the Metaphysics, but also by the Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics, a work recently discovered, which also casts light on the reason of Averroes' hesitation on this issue.

The ultimate reason of the disagreement between Avicenna and Averroes on these two issues lies in Aristotle's works. In the last two books of the Physics, Aristotle provides a lengthy proof of the existence of a First Mover that is properly physical, i.e. based on the idea that the causes of movement (namely of change) cannot be infinite. Another proof of God's existence, similar to, but distinct from, the one offered in the Physics, occurs in the twelfth book of the Metaphysics (A, 6-7), where it is followed by a more detailed description of the nature of the Unmoved Mover. Thus, Aristotle's proof of God's existence occurs both in the Physics and in the Metaphysics. Likewise, the ways in which Aristotle describes the theme of the discipline he is dealing with in the Metaphysics are different and somehow conflicting: first, he portrays metaphysics as the "wisdom" dealing with the first causes and principles (A, 1, 981b 28-29; A, 2, 982b 9-10); then, he clarifies that it is the universal "science" of "being qua being", in distinction from the particular sciences (I, 1, 1003a 20-26); finally, he adds that it is the knowledge of what is eternal, immovable and existing on its own ("separat-


ed"), and identifies metaphysics as the "theological philosophy" dealing with the divine (5, 1, 1026a 13-23). Thus, also in this respect, subsequent interpreters have had good reasons to take both "being" in general, as Avicenna does, and the separate being, as Averroes does, as the subject-matter of metaphysics.

Arabic philosophy is the area in which the two issues discussed here emerge as problems for the first time in the history of Western thought. This is mainly due to Avicenna's reaction against two previous trends in Arabic philosophy. On the one hand, he reacted against the tendency of the Aristotelians of Baghdad to regard the proof from movement in Aristotle's *Physics* as a way to establish the existence not only of the First Mover in physics, but also of the First Principle of existence in metaphysics. On the other hand, following al-Farabi, he rejected the attempt of al-Kindi and his school to interpret metaphysics in a strong theological perspective, and to reduce the content of Aristotle's work to little more than book A. In the former respect, in Avicenna's system of the philosophical sciences, metaphysics is superior to physics and all the other disciplines, having the function of grounding the principles of these latter; it, therefore, offers its own proof of God's existence, without assuming it from a lower science, since the knowledge of God, in all His aspects, is the "goal" or "aim" of metaphysics. In the latter respect, Avicenna defends the ontological dimension of metaphysics against the Kindian reduction of this discipline to a philosophical theology by showing that "existent" is its subject-matter, and that metaphysics can have a theological goal precisely because it has an ontological starting-point.


9. Here and in what follows, the English translation of the *Posterior Analytics* is taken from Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, Translated with a Commentary by J. Barnes, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993. Matta's translation (Al-Naqd al-khamsi li-manjiz Aristi, ed. F. Jibr, Dar al-Fikr al-Lubnani, Beyrouth 1995, henceforth: *Aristotles Arabus* [1995], vol. 1, 465a-464b; cp. Manjiz Aristi, ed. A. Badawi, 3 voll., Makkah 1982, 1985; Dâr al-Kunub al-masiriyah, Cairo 1948-1952, henceforth: *Aristotles Arabus* [1948-1952], vol. II, 330a-331a) says: "For every demonstrative science there are three things: one are the things that we posit as existent, namely that [particular] genus, of which it [i.e. the demonstrative science] considers the affections belonging to itself; and the well-known kinds of knowledge called "common", namely the first things of which they [i.e. the demonstrative sciences] first clarify [the other things]; and third the affections, namely those of which they assume what each of them signifies. Anonymous translation (Ibn Rudi, Sûr al-Burhn li-Aristi wa-ridâd al-Burhn, ed. A. Badawi, Kuwait 1495/1984, henceforth: Ibn Rudi [1984], 310b) says: "Every demonstration is arranged and constituted from three things. First, the subject-matter, of which the demonstrator tries to clarify the affections that accompany it by themselves; this is the thing that is taken to be existent. Second, the statements that must be accepted and are immediate, by means of which the fact that the predicate belongs to the subject-matter is clarified. Third, the predicates, which are investigated with regard to what their name signifies."
This passage makes clear that, according to Aristotle, every science takes for granted the existence of the kind, or genus, of things with which it deals: in Aristotle's own words, it "posits [it] to exist". In the parallel passage in *An. Post. A*, 7, 73a 39–b 2, and elsewhere (A, 9, 76a 12), Aristotle qualifies the genus as "underlying" (τὸ ἐνόειν τὸ ὑποτυπούμενον); this expression, rendered as al-ǧins al-mawdū' or al-šabā' al-mawdū'a in the Arabic translations, is the origin of the technical term "subject-matter" (ὑποτυπούμενον, mawdū'a) in later Greek and Arabic philosophy. Thus, rephrasing Aristotle's own words, we can say that Pr establishes that every science assumes the existence of its own subject-matter (i.e. no science proves its existence).

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10. *An. Post. A*, 7, 73a 39–b 2: "There are three things involved in demonstrations: one, what is being demonstrated, or the conclusion (this is what holds of some kind in itself); one, the axioms (axioms are the items from which the demonstrations proceed); third the underlying kind (τὸ ἐνόειν τὸ ὑποτυπούμενον) whose attributes — i.e. the items accidental to it in itself — the demonstrations make plain". Matz's translation (Aristoteles Arabus [1999], vol. I, 455, n. 9. Aristotle Aristotleus Arabus [1948–52], vol. II, 331, n. 9. This is so because the things that are found in demonstration are three: one is the thing that gets clarified, namely the conclusion, i.e. what belongs to a certain genus in itself; the second are the well-known kinds of knowledge, namely the things from which it (namely the demonstrative procedure) starts. The third is the underlying genus (al-ǧīna al-mawdū'ī), namely that of which the demonstration indicates and makes known the affections and the accidents that belong to it in itself. Anonymous translation (Ibn Rusd [1984], 278–279): "The things from which the nature of demonstration is built are these. First, the predicate, namely that which is clarified as belonging to the subject (al-mawdū'ī) by itself. Second, the well-known kind of knowledge, namely the premises by means of which the fact that the predicate belongs to the subject is clarified. Third, the underlying nature (al-šabā' al-mawdū'a), whose affections and accidents belong to it by themselves the demonstration takes into account. For the mention of the "underlying kind" in *An. Post. A*, 9, 76a 12 (al-ǧīna al-mawdū'ī) in Aristotle Aristotleus Arabus [1999], vol. I, 460, n. 4. in Aristotle Aristotleus Arabus [1948–52], vol. II, 357, n. om. in Ibn Rusd [1984], see below, F. 2–3 [8].

11. The expression "underlying subject" (ὑποτυπούμενον, mawdū'a) in *An. Post. A*, 7, 71a 24, does not have a specific epistemological sense, rather than "subject of predication". The term ὑποτυπούμενον in Pr, in the sense of "subject-matter", is first applied to "being" by Alexander of Aphrodisias in his Commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Through Alexander of Aphrodisias and al-Fāraḥ the idea that "being" is the "subject-matter" of metaphysics will reach Avicenna (see Bertolaci, *The Reception*, 112–149).

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Later on in *An. Post. A*, 28, while discussing the criteria of identity for sciences, Aristotle relates the unity of a science to the unity of its genus (subject-matter).

Pr: Every single science has only one genus of things (one subject-matter) with which it deals.

*An. Post. A*, 28, 87a 38–39: A science is one if it is concerned with one kind (ἐνόειν) – with whatever items come from the primitives and are parts or attributes of them in themselves.

The exact meaning of the second half of this sentence does not concern us here (the doctrine expressed therein is regarded as "singular" by J. Barnes). What is important is, in the first half, Aristotle's emphasis on the unity of the genus, or subject-matter, of a science.

Besides the axioms mentioned in Pr (the universal logical laws of non-contradiction and excluded-middle, and/or less universal principles, like the mathematical rule "equals taken from equals leave equals"), in *An. Post. A*, 2 among the principles of a science Aristotle includes also hypotheses or suppositions (i.e. propositional assumptions of existence) and definitions. In A, 10, axioms, on the one hand, and hypotheses and definitions, on the other, are called respectively "common" and "proper items". About proper principles, in *An. Post. A*, 9, Aristotle states that they must be exclusive to each science, if the demonstrations depending on them have to be demonstrations as such, rather than accidental demonstrations. In the passage of this chapter reported below, Aristotle
Amos Bertolacci

a) portrays demonstrations as such as those whose middle term belongs to the same genus taken into account by the science that provides them;
b) offers an example of accidental demonstration (the demonstration of something regarding harmonics by means of a principle belonging to arithmetic);
c) states the main tenet of the chapter, i.e. the fact that demonstrations as such depend on proper principles that are exclusive to them;
d) goes back briefly to the accidental demonstration just proposed;
e) and finally maintains that proper principles are inadmissible.

This last doctrine represents the third principle from the Posterior Analytics discussed here.

P3: The proper principles of the sciences cannot be demonstrated.

An Post A, 9, 764 8-17: [a] Hence if this [i.e. the middle term explaining the conclusion] too holds in itself of what it holds of, the middle term must be of the same kind. [b] Otherwise, it will be like proving something in harmonics by arithmetic. Things of this sort are indeed proved in the same way [i.e. proofs in harmonics by arithmetic are like standard proofs], but there is a difference: the fact falls under one science (for the underlying kind is different), while the reason falls under the higher science which is concerned with the attributes which hold of it in itself.

[c] Hence from this consideration too it is clear that you cannot demonstrate anything simpliciter except from its own principles. [d] But the principles of these sciences [i.e. of harmonics and arithmetic] have a common feature [i.e. the middle term, common to both sciences, employed in the demonstration it questions]. [e] If this is clear, it is also clear that you cannot demonstrate the proper principles (ἴσιος, ἰσόξος) of anything.

A detailed explanation of points [a]-[e] can be found in Barnes' commentary on the Posterior Analytics. What is crucial for our purposes is the interpretation of point [e]. According to Barnes, this sentence attests that, for Aristotle, the principles of the particular sciences are not demonstrable in any way. According to other interpreters, like W.D. Ross and M. Mignucci, on the contrary,

the principles of a subordinate science can be proved from the principles of the superior science.6

This latter interpretation is reflected in the second Arabic translation of P3. Whereas the translation by Abū Bīr Matta (P3.1) corresponds grosso modo to the Greek text, the later Arabic translation (P3.2) is remarkably different from Aristotle's wording.

P3.1: The proper principles of the sciences cannot be demonstrated.

Arabic translation by Abū Bīr Matta: [a] If, then, this also exists in virtue of what exists by itself, the middle term must necessarily be homogeneous, correlate and belonging to one genus as such. [b] If this is not so, in this way the items of the [science of the] harmony of melodies are clarified by means of the science of number. [Things] like these are clarified in a way that corresponds to a single pattern, but they have a distinction. For the demonstration that [the thing] exists belongs to the ultimate science, since the underlying genus is other. As to why [the thing] is, it is the task of the science that is superior, namely that to which these affections belong by itself. [c] Thus, from this it is also clear and evident that there is no way to demonstrate each [thing] absolutely except from the principles of each [thing]. [d] But the principles of these [things] may have something common. [e] If this is clear, then it is evident that there is no way to demonstrate the proper principles of each [thing].17

P3.2: The proper principles of the sciences can be demonstrated by metaphysics.

Arabic anonymous translation, in Averroes, Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics, A.69-70: [e] Since demonstration proceeds from things that are essential and proper, the middle term must belong to the same nature, [b] or to the nature that is superior (n so far as the middle term does not belong to the same nature, but to the nature that is superior to it), like the middle terms coming from the science of numbers, by means of which the questions of music are clarified. Both demonstrations, the superior and the inferior, proceed in the same way; they are different in so far as the one which is underneath clarifies that the thing

15. See Aristotle, Posterior Analytics, 135-137.
17. Aristotle's Averroes [1999], vol. 1, 465, n. 4, according to the readings reported in notes 13 and 25 to the text (cp. Aristotle's Averroes [948-51], 325-327).
P3.2 is remarkably different from P3 on the issue of the indemonstrability of the proper principles of the sciences. Three points are noteworthy. The example of demonstration per accidens given by Aristotle in section [b] becomes a second case of demonstration per se in the anonymous translation, thus legitimizing the demonstration of a theorem in a lower science by means of middle terms coming from the higher discipline. This implies the radical transformation of section [d]: whereas Aristotle says that, in the case [b], there is a common feature to the principles of harmonics and arithmetic (i.e., the middle term used in the demonstration per accidens of a theorem of harmonics by means of arithmetic), the anonymous translation reports a common discipline that is charged with clarifying the principles of the particular sciences. Consequently, the tenet of section [c]—which in Aristotle belongs to a distinct paragraph—is joined to section [d] and restricted to the particular disciplines: the impossibility of demonstrating the proper principles of a given science is not asserted universally, as Aristotle does, but regards only the master of this same science. Other differences with regard to Aristotle on the same issue are detectable elsewhere in the Arabic anonymous translation. The common discipline mentioned in [d] cannot be other than metaphysics.

A careful study of the authorship, content, sources and diffusion of this second translation is certainly a major desideratum. H. Hugonnard-Roche has convincingly shown that it is an explicative paraphrase, rather than a literal translation, that it represents a reworking of Mattā’s version, and that its main source is Themistius’ commentary on the Posterior Analytics. The idea that metaphysics proves the principles of the other sciences was common in late Greek philosophy, in so far as it mirrors the Neoplatonic idea of a hierarchy of sciences with metaphysics at the top. It can be found, for example, in Ammonius’ commentary on the Metaphysics (according to the reportatio of the disciple Asclepius).

18. Averroes [1098], 394r, 296, 296r, Latin translation (Aristoteles Latinus IV 14 cxt, 204r-205r): Ere cum demonstratio non sit nisi ex rebus essentiazibus et propriis, tunc oporect ut sit terminus medium ex natura ipsa aut ex natura quae est aliena, si autem medium non est ex natura ipsa sed ex natura quae est aliena, sicut media quibus ostendendum questiones musicae (et sunt ex scientia numeri) tunc anhbe demonstrationes superiorier et inferiorier, erunt cum demonstratiuns unius et diversificantur proprietates quod illud quod est subitus ostendit quod est res, sed res quae est superior ostendit quare quod est, quoniam medium in ea est causa propinqua, iam ergo manifestum est et apparens super omnibus quia impossibile est ut demonstretur super aliquam rem absurdo nisi ex rebus essentiazibus et principiis quae sunt propria e rei et aut quidem communis intendit ostendere remqua principiis. Et cum hoc sit sic, tunc manifestum est apparens quod impossibile est quod cunctaque artis opifex ostendat principia sua artis et propria.

19. In An. Post A, 10, 763a35-37, for example, Aristotle maintains once again that no science demonstrates the principles of its genus, i.e. its proper principles, meaning probably this time by “principles” the primitive terms of the science, rather than its hypotheses or definitions (see Aristotle, Posterior Analytics, 177). Aristotle’s text (I 11) call principles [1098] in each kind those items of which it is not possible to prove that they are) is rendered faithfully by Mattā (Aristoteles Arabus [1099], vol. 1, 465, 475). Aristotle’s Arabic [1068-12], vol. 11, 356a, 1 mean by first things (anatas) in each genus the things that we describe, namely those whose existence no one can demonstrate), whereas it is radically modified in the anonymous translation [see Rojek [1984], 303, 306. The subject-matter (al-naφūl) in demonstration must be that about which it is assumed and established that it exists, without its existence being investigated). The application of indemonstrability to the subject-matter, rather than to the principles, of a science appears to be intended to allow a demonstration of these latter.


and in Simplicius’s commentary on the *Physica*. In all likelihood, however, the direct source from which this idea was incorporated in the anonymous translation is also in this case, Themistius’s paraphrase of the *Posterior Analytics*. In commenting on *An. Post. A*, 9, 76a 8-17, Themistius maintains: “Therefore, either it is absolutely impossible to demonstrate the principles of geometry, arithmetic, music, and the other sciences. Or it is possible, but not by that science that employs these as principles (for this [science] would be unable to adduce other principles of [these] principles), but rather by a different [science], higher than all [the other sciences] (ναζων ἑως τρικαλίων), to which all sciences are subordinated. [...] This is the celebrated wisdom — it should be simply and primarily called “science” — which investigates the first causes of all things and the utmost causes. For utmost causes are the ones that have no [further] cause” (emphasis added).23 It is important to notice, however, that whereas Themistius expresses the idea of the superiority of metaphysics with respect to the other sciences in terms of a higher rank, the anonymous translation expresses it in terms of a wider universality.

No evidence of al-Fārābī and Avicenna’s acquaintance with the anonymous translation of the *Posterior Analytics* is available. If this translation was accomplished, as it seems, during the 11th century, al-Fārābī did not know it, and Avicenna might have not known it as well. In any case, the idea that metaphysics provides the foundation of the principles of the other sciences was endorsed and coherently displayed by these two authors.24 This same idea, on the contrary


**Avicenna and Averroes on the Proof of God’s Existence**

— and principle P3.2 of the anonymous translation expressing it — posed a crucial difficulty to Averroes, as we are going to see.

2. **AVICENNA**

The first tentative application to metaphysics of the epistemology of the *Posterior Analytics* was performed by Aristotle himself in *Metaphysics* 1. Thus, the references to the “attributes” and “principles” of “being qua being” in 1, 1, the description of the peculiar unity of being, and the consequent unity of metaphysics, in 1, 2, and the defense of the logical “axioms” of non-contradiction and excluded-middle in the remaining chapters of this book, are just a resumption of the aforementioned passages of the fourth treatise of *The Organon*.

In *Metaphysics* 1, however, the synthesis of *Posterior Analytics* and metaphysics is not accomplished.25 This task was performed by Avicenna, who is the first Aristotelian interpreter who fully applied to the *Metaphysics* the epistemological rules of the *Posterior Analytics*. In this respect, his most extensive metaphysical work, the *Ikhāyāt al-Sifā*, represents a complete reworking of the epistemological profile of Aristotle’s writing, and can be regarded as a real “second beginning” of metaphysics in Western philosophy.

In his discussion of the subject-matter of metaphysics in *Ikhāyāt al-Sifā* 1, 1-2, Avicenna applies Pr several times: first, to exclude that God is the subject-matter of metaphysics;26 then, to exclude the same

25. He is hesitant, for example, in assigning to “being qua being” the status of “genus”, since “being”, in his opinion, is not and cannot be a genus in the proper sense; see, however, the mention of the “species” of “being” in 1, 2, 100b 21-22, and the veiled references to “genus” in connection with “being” in 100b 20; 22; 35.

point about the four ultimate causes; finally, to prove positively that "existent" is the subject-matter in question. The third and final argument advanced by Avicenna to establish this last point is as follows:

Text 1: Avicenna, *Ikhāyiyyāt*, 1, 1342 [1257-1323]  
[5] It is evident to you from all this that "existent qua existent" [...] must be assumed as the subject-matter of this discipline, for the reasons we have said, and also because it is not necessary to know its quiddity and to establish its [existence] — such that some science other than this one would be charged with showing its state [i.e. the state of its quiddity and its existence]; [b = Pr.1] since establishing [the existence of] the subject-matter and verifying its quiddity cannot occur in the science of which it is the subject-matter, but only assuming its existence and quiddity [can occur in it].

Although P2 is not explicitly mentioned by Avicenna in the *Ikhāyiyyāt*,23 its influence is clear: Avicenna excludes one candidate to the role of subject-matter of metaphysics after the other (God; the four ultimate causes), until he declares what the true subject-matter of this discipline is ("existent qua existent"). In so doing, he never takes into account the possibility that metaphysics can have more than one subject-matter.29

Principle P3.1 is mentioned in a possible objection that Avicenna takes into account after having argued that metaphysics proves subject-matter [of metaphysics], [b = Pr.1] For the subject-matter of each science is something whose existence is admitted in that science, and of which only the states are investigated. This has already been made known elsewhere. [c] But the existence of God [...] cannot be assumed [...] in this science; it is rather a thing sought in it. The doctrine of this text is repeated in 1, 9, 60a [60b]. The reference in [b] is to the part of the Sīfsī corresponding to the *Posterior Analytics (Al-Sīfsī, al-Muntūq al-Burban)*, ed. A. Alīfī al-Maḥbūba al-amāṭīyya, Cairo 1956, henceforth *Burbanī*, II, 155a-1.

23. *Ikhāyiyyāt*, 1, 86o [88a]: 4. How the subject-matter of a science — whose states [only] are investigated among the things sought for [in that science] — can be something whose existence is sought in it?  
29. See *Burbanī*, II, 6 155a-1.

29. The mention of "existent" as the "first subject-matter" (mawālihi awza) in 1, 6, 60a [60b], see note 5] and in 1, 2, 1342a [1343a], does not entail the presence of a second subject-matter, since in the *Ikhāyiyyāt* Avicenna does not apply the name of "subject-matter" to any item other than "existent". A broader and less rigorous concept of subject-matter occurs in *Burbanī*, II, 2, 166.

God’s existence, and that the subject-matter of metaphysics is "existent qua existent".

Text 2: Avicenna, *Ikhāyiyyāt*, 1, 14a [1343-1348]  
[a] Someone might object that, if "existent" is taken as the subject-matter of this science, establishing [the existence of] the principles of the existents cannot occur in this science, [b = P3.1] since in every science the investigation regards the consequent attributes of its subject-matter, not the principles of it.

In the answer, Avicenna does not question the validity of P3.1. He just shows that the objection misses the point, since "existent qua existent" has, properly speaking, no principles: the principles of the existents mentioned by the fictive adversary are not principles of "existent qua existent" in its entirety, but only of a part of it, namely of some existents (the existents that are caused).30 Two remarks are in order. First, in section [b], the expression "principles of it (i.e. of the subject-matter)" has a peculiar meaning, in so far as it refers to the causes of the genus taken into account by the science (namely God in the case of metaphysics), rather than to its epistemological premises (axioms, hypothesis or definitions).31 Second, in general terms, Avicenna understands P3.1 in a way similar to the one proposed by Ross and Migone, i.e. without excluding that the principles of the particular sciences can be demonstrated by a superior science, namely metaphysics. In fact, the central treatises (II-VII) of the *Ikhāyiyyāt* are meant to provide the metaphysical foundation of the epistemological principles of logic, natural philosophy and mathematics.32

On the basis of Pr.1, the core of Avicenna’s proof that God is not the subject-matter of metaphysics is the doctrine according to

30. In 1, 2, 14a [1343-1348].
31. In this sense the principles of physics are called "principles said as causes" (doxai ὅσοι ἀφαίρετοι λογικοί) by Simplicius (In Phys., 153a). In *Metaphysics*, 1, 1029a-7, Aristotle mentions both the principles and the "causes" (ofna) of mathematics and every other rational science (see Davidson, *Proof for Eternity*, 525 and note 25). The same use of "principles" and "causes" with regard to physics occurs in a text of Alexander of Aphrodisias’ commentary on the *Metaphysics* reported by Averroes (see below, note 50).
32. See the detailed discussion in Bertolucci, *The Reception*, 365-302.
which metaphysics, and only metaphysics, can prove God’s existence. Avicenna’s argument is a reductio ad absurdum.

Text 3: Avicenna, Ilāhiyyūt 1, 1, 66-69 [46-58]
[a] If this were not so [i.e. if God’s existence were not a thing sought in metaphysics, then [b] either [God’s existence] would be assumed in this science and sought in another; [c] or it would be assumed in this science and not sought in another. [b] But both cases are false. [against 1] For [God’s existence] cannot be sought in another science. Since the other sciences are either moral, or political, or physical, or mathematical, or logical (among the philosophical sciences there is none that escapes this division), but in none of them is how to establish [the existence of] God investigated. [1] [c] [against 1] But [God’s existence] cannot either not to be sought in another science. Since, in such a case, it would not be sought in any science at all, being either clear in itself, or without hope of being clarified rationally. But it is neither clear in itself, nor without hope of being clarified, since there is a proof (dālīh) of it. Besides, how can the existence of what is without hope of being clarified be taken for granted? [d] It remains that the investigation of it occurs only in this science.

In section [c] the term “proof” (dālīh) refers to the so-called demonstration qīia of God’s existence.33

Having excluded that any of the other disciplines can provide the proof of God’s existence (Text 3, [b]), Avicenna has to explain why Aristotle seems to provide such a proof in the Physics.

Text 4: Avicenna, Ilāhiyyūt 1, 1, 66-74 [58-63]
[a] It has appeared to you in [the science of] natural things that the Divinity is neither a body, nor a bodily power, but is one and free from matter

33. The proof or existence is one of the “evident proofs” (dālīh al-wādīl) regarding God mentioned in Ilāhiyyūt VIII, 5, 944b [p. 311], in Burhan 1, 7 Avicenna distinguishes the “demonstration of the why” (burhan il-ma‘ānī) from the “demonstration of the that” (burhan an-na‘a) or dālīh; the latter proves only the truth of a state of affairs, without providing its cause, the former provides also its cause. Since God is the First Cause, no further cause of Him can be provided. The term “proof” or “sign” (dālīh) corresponds to tekemīl in the expression syglogismo iermeretico employed by the Neoplatonic commentators of Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics in place of the Aristotelian syglogismo hui (see H. Diels, The Limitations of Knowledge According to Ibn Sīnā: Epistemological and Theological Aspects and the Consequences, in M. Lutz-Bachmann - A. Fiderer - P. Anzelic (eds.), Erkenntnis und Wissenschaft, Probleme der Epistemologie in der Philosophie des Mittelalters, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2004, 25-34).

34. See the passages discussed in Gutas, Avicenna, 263-265. It seems to me that the texts from the Kitaib al-Inqīṣad (Book of the Erie Judgment) and the Memoir of a Disciple from Bagh reported by Gutas do not attest Avicenna’s absolute rejection of the physical proof, but only of its application to a metaphysical context. Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, 237 and note 6, detects the presence of a physical proof of God’s existence in the part of the Nagāt dealing with natural philosophy (ll. 12-14).

35. In Ilāhiyyūt IX, 1, 372b [435m-50], Avicenna states that he aims now at increasing the reader’s insight about the eternal heavenly movement and its mover, already taken into account in natural philosophy (the “natural sciences” are mentioned at p. 373b, [435n]; see Ibn Sīnā, Al-Ṣūfī, al-Tahāyyūt, wa-Samī‘ul-ḥāfīr, ed. S. Zaydī, Al-Hay’al-mustiyya al-‘amma li-l-kitaib, Cairo 1983, IV, 15, 333, 1c, IV, 6, 303c).
bility of proving, in its own way, God’s existence (and, consequently, of dealing with God’s nature and related issue).\textsuperscript{36}

But where in the Ilahiyyat lies the metaphysical proof of God’s existence, and what is its precise nature? Scholars are divided in the answer to this question. Some point to Chapter I, 6, in which Avicenna provides an analysis of the concept of existence, that leads to the distinction of a single Existent which is Necessary on account of Itself, namely God, from a multiplicity of existents which, on account of themselves, are only possible (i.e. contingent) and derive their existence, and their consequent relative necessity, from the Necessary Existent.\textsuperscript{37} Among these scholars, some enlarge the scope of the proof to encompass, besides I, 6, also Chapters I, 5 (the distinction between essence and existence), IV, 1 (the analysis of anteriority and posteriority) and VIII, 1 (finiteness of efficient causation).\textsuperscript{38} Others, on the contrary, focus exclusively

on Chapters VIII, 1-3, in which Avicenna argues that each type of causality must have a principle or starting-point, since the causal chains cannot be infinite: the principle or starting-point in the realm of efficient causality is God.\textsuperscript{39} The argument in I, 6 is not, strictly speaking, Aristotelian; its background lies rather in pre-Avicennian Arabic philosophy and Islamic theology.\textsuperscript{40} The account in VIII, 1-3, by contrast, is based on the doctrine of the finiteness of the chains of material, formal, moving and final causality in \textit{Metaphysics} \textit{α}, 2.\textsuperscript{41} Even though the argument in I, 6 displays clear

\textsuperscript{36} This “transferential” of the investigation of God’s existence and nature from physics to metaphysics in the Ilahiyyat parallels the analogous displacement of the treatment of the human soul’s destiny (the “fruit” of natural philosophy) from psychology to metaphysics, as documented by Gutas, Avicenna, 254-261. In I, 1, 19, [38a, 4a], on the other hand, the proof that all moved things ultimately depend on the First Mover is mentioned among the topics that metaphysics assumes from physics. The superiority of metaphysics with respect to physics does not mean for Avicenna the absolute independence of the former from the latter: in chapter I, 3, he acknowledges that metaphysics takes for granted from physics several theses proven in this latter, but makes clear that this dependence does not prevent metaphysics from grounding the principles of physics.

\textsuperscript{37} G. Hourani, \textit{The Sinas on Necessary and Possible Existence}, «Philosophical Forum», 4 (1973), 54-56 regards Ilahiyyat I, 6 and Kitab al-Naght II, 1-3 and II, 12 as different versions of Avicenna’s analysis of necessary and possible existence, and his proof of a First Cause derived from it (74). U. Rudolph, \textit{La preuve de l’existence de Dieu chez Avicenne et dans la theologie musulmane}, in A. De Libera – A. Elamrani-Jamal – A. Galonnier (cur.), \textit{Lumos et philosophia Hommage à J. Jolivet}, Vrin, Paris 1997, 339-346, takes I, 6 as providing the same proof given in Naght and Kitab al-Naght (341, note 11). Also Averroes maintains that Avicenna’s proof of God’s existence is based on the distinction between “necessary” and “possible” (see the passages of the \textit{De Substantia et in the Tafsili al-shafi‘i}, reported below, note 49), and insists on the Islamic theological background of this proof (see below, Text 7 [6]).

\textsuperscript{38} M.E. Marmura, Avicenna’s \textit{Proof from Contingency} in the \textit{Metaphysics of His al-Shafi‘i}, «Medieval Studies», 42 (1998), 337-352, envisages in Avicenna’s works a single type of proof (which he calls “proof from contingency for God’s existence”) having different versions and displaying its fullest extent in these \textit{loci} of the Ilahiyyat; according to Marmura, this proof is “metaphysical” since it is not based on the observation of the external world, but rather on the intellectual intuition of existence and on the analysis of this concept.

\textsuperscript{39} Davidson, \textit{Proofs for Eternity}, contends that the only proof of God’s existence that occurs in the Ilahiyyat is the one in VIII, 1-3 (359). According to him, the analysis of the concepts of “necessarily existent being” and “possibly existent being” in I, 6 is conducive to a description of God’s nature, not to a proof of His existence (359); it supplements the proof of God’s existence in VIII, 1-3, by providing a method for assigning attributes to the First Cause (314). Among Avicenna’s works, Davidson distinguishes the Ilahiyyat, in which the proof of God’s existence is based on the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes, from the \textit{Ma’ani al-Naght} and the \textit{Fatwa}, in which this proof rests upon the analysis of the concepts of “possibly existent” and “necessarily existent” (289, 350-351). R. Wionowski, Avicenna’s \textit{Metaphysics in Context}, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (New York) 2005, has broadened Davidson’s perspective, on account of the works of Avicenna examined and the range of sources taken into consideration; his thorough inspection of Avicenna’s œuvre and background, however, does not […] invalidate Davidson’s hypothesis (262), since the seeds of what Davidson sees as a two-track approach [to the issue of the proof of God’s existence] can be found in two of Avicenna’s earliest works, the \textit{Hikma Aridiyya} and the \textit{Madda wa-marida} (263).

\textsuperscript{40} See Gutas, Avicenna, 261-263. Davidson, Proof for Eternity, 389, states that this proof is only suggested by the Metaphysics, and that it can be understood as starting where Aristotle left off.

\textsuperscript{41} Avicenna’s reworking of \textit{Metaph. α, 2} in Ilahiyyat VIII, 1-3 is analyzed in Davidson, Proof for Eternity, 339-340, and Bertolacci, \textit{The Reception}, 312-316; 322-327. The use of the doctrine of α, 2 as a way of proving God’s existence has a basis in the Metaphysics itself: in a passage of the proof of God’s existence in A. 7 (272a 14-16), Aristotle apparently restates the doctrine of this chapter of a [see Bertolacci, The Reception, 57 and note 68]. Davidson (338, note 15) points to Simplicius’ commentary on the Physica (239a 34-35) as witness of the consideration of the arguments of α, 2 as an independent proof of God’s existence. The connection between α and λ appears to be characteristic also of al-Khulafa’s approach to Metaphysics (see Bertolacci, The Reception, 61).
similarities with the proof of God's existence in a work closely related - in content and chronology - to the Ilahiyyat, the Kitab al-Na'at (Book of Salvation).42 the evidence internal to the Ilahiyyat points rather to VIII, 1-3 as the place where the proof of God's existence is offered:

Text 5: Avicenna, Ilahiyyat I, 3, 255 [236-244].
[a] You must know that, in fact, there is a method [conductive] to [showing] that the goal of this science is to attain a starting-point [of the existence of reality] not after another science.43 [b] For there will appear to you later (wa-hd) a pointer (iltima) indicating that we have a way of establishing [the existence of] the First Principle, not on account of the method of inference from sensible things (ta'liq al-isti'dall min al-amr al-mahsasa), but rather on account of the method of universal and intelligible premises (ta'liq muqaddimat kulliya 'aqillya): [these premises] entail that existence must have a Principle which exists necessarily; exclude that It is mutable or multiple in any way; and entail that It must be the principle of the universe and the universe derives necessarily from It according to its own order. [c] But, due to the weakness of our souls, we are not able to follow this demonstrative method (alaika al-ta'liq al-turhaim) - which consists in proceeding from principles to consequences and from the cause to the effect - except in some groups of the ranks of the things that exist from them [i.e. from the principles], indistinctly.

Text 5 is not without difficulties.44 What is important for our purposes is the fact that in section [b] the proof of God's existence is mentioned in connection with a topic (the derivation of the universe from the First Principle) that is totally absent in I, 6, and is dealt with only after VIII, 1-3, namely in IX, 1-5. The three themes referred to in section [b], on the contrary, mirror quite precisely, albeit summarily, the series of topics of Ilahiyyat VIII-IX: “existence must have a Principle which exists necessarily” (VIII, 1-3); “It is not mutable or multiple in any way” (VIII, 4-7); “It must be the principle of the universe and the universe derives necessarily from It according to its own order” (IX, 1-5). This indication is confirmed by at least four passages of Ilahiyyat VIII, which attest that Chapters VIII, 1-3 are the section of the Ilahiyyat where the proof of God's existence is provided.45 Thus, even though we cannot exclude that the adverb “later”, in section [b] of Text 5, refers immediately to Chapter I, 6 (i.e. to the argument that functions as proof of God's existence in the Na'at), this latter is portrayed, at

Avicenna and Averroes on the Proof of God's Existence

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most, as a “pointer” (išāb), or indication, of the possibility of a “metaphysical” proof of God’s existence, not as the proof itself. Chapters 1, 6–7 occur in the introductory part of the Ilahiyyāt: their aim is just to distinguish the Necessary Existence by virtue of itself from the possible existent by virtue of itself, and to enumerate the respective features of both (not to prove their existence).

This being the case, the Ilahiyyāt turns out to be original with regard to the other metaphysical writings of Avicenna. Chapters VIII, 1–3 present a proof of God’s existence that, besides being properly metaphysical, rather than physical, is based on a doctrine of Aristotle’s Metaphysics, rather than on concepts of previous Arabic philosophy or Islamic theology, like its “pointer” in I, 6, and like the proofs that can be found in the Naṣīrī and the other Avicennian works. Even though traces of this same Aristotelian doctrine can be found in the proofs of God’s existence in the other metaphysical writings of Avicenna, in these latter the doctrine in question is merely accessory, and in none of them is accompanied by a comprehensive paraphrase and thorough discussion of its place of origin (Metaph. α, 2), like in the Ilahiyyāt. This fits quite well Avicenna’s preliminary description of the Sīfī as a book constitutively dependent on the ways of expositions of the Peripatetic tradition.

To summarize: in the Ilahiyyāt, on account of principles Pr. 3.1, Avicenna shows that “existent qua existent”, rather than God and the ultimate four causes, is the subject-matter of metaphysics (Text 1), and defends from possible objections both this contention and the possibility of a metaphysical proof of God’s existence (Text 2). The fact that metaphysics provides such a proof allows Avicenna to dismiss the claim that God is the subject-matter of this discipline (Text 3). With regard to the proof of God’s existence, Avicenna states that in no way does it depend on physics (Text 4), and indicates clearly enough that, in the Ilahiyyāt, it occurs in Chapters VIII, 1–3. Thus, the argument based on the finiteness of the chain of causes and effects and leading to establish the existence of a First Efficient Cause (VIII, 1–3) – rather than the argument based on the concept of existence, conducive to enucleating the features of the Necessary Existence in virtue of itself (I, 6–7) – is the proof of God’s existence that can be found in the Ilahiyyāt.

Its background in Aristotle’s Metaphysics (α, 2), rather than in the Arabic philosophical and theological tradition, fits quite well the avowed Peripatetic character of the Sīfī. In other words: between an Aristotelian proof which is not metaphysical (the physical proof by way of movement), and a metaphysical proof which is

46. Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, shows that an essential element of the proof in the Naṣīrī is the assumption of the empirical datum of the existence of something (289: cp. 303); this empirical assumption, however, is missing in Ilahiyyāt 1, 6. Although Avicenna provides two proofs of God’s existence (metaphysical and physical) in the youthful Mabāḥath wa-mlād (see the passage translated by Gutis, Avicenna, 263), the presence of two metaphysical proofs of God’s existence in the mature Ilahiyyāt appears unlikely.

47. Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, 299, stresses that the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes is included in, but “not genuinely needed” for, the proof of God’s existence in the Naṣīrī and the Fārābī, and that these two works “can dispense with” it (299). In them, the impossibility of an infinite regress is inferred as a corollary (304), by means of an inference that is “artificial and awkward” (304), thus producing a strain of thought that is “circuitous and redundant” (311). According to Davidson, the Naṣīrī and the Persian work Dānešnīm-e Allā’t provide the same kind of proof of God’s existence: (289: 311). He notes, however, the important differences between the arguments of these two works, and the similarities between Dānešnīm-e Allā’t Naṣīrī and Fārābī in this regard (340–341). A comparative investigation of God’s existence in the different metaphysical works by Avicenna is certainly major desideratum of future research. The analysis provided by Wisnovsky, Avicenna’s Metaphysics, 245–253, represents a solid basis for this task. On the proof of God’s existence in the Naṣīrī and the Fārābī, see Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, 285–310. On the proof in the Fārābī, see also R. Muñoz, La existencia de Dios en Avicena, in Milenario de Avicena, Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, Madrid 1981, 89–99; T. Mayer, Ibn Sīnā’s Burḥān al-Sulṭānī, «Journal of Islamic Studies», 12 (2001), 19–39, especially 33, note 32. On the proof in the Ridda Ash’īya, see W. Craig, Arabic Theologians and Philosophers, in ed. The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz, Mc Millan Press, London 1980, 65–95.

48. Al-Sīfī, al-Mantiq, al-Madhahb, ed. G.S. Qazwast. al-Maḥbūb, A.F. Al-Aswani, Al-Maḥbūb al-Maḥbūb, Cairo 1952, 194, transl. in Gutis, Avicenna, 52. Davidson, tends to portray the inclusion of the doctrine of the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes in the proofs of God’s existence in the Naṣīrī and the Fārābī as idiosyncratic (Avicenna [...] was [...] to such an extent under the influence of arguments from the impossibility of an infinite regress that he forced his new proof into the older model’s Proofs for Eternity, 351). We may wonder, on the contrary, whether this was not an intentional move on Avicenna’s part, meant to preserve a trace of the proof of the Ilahiyyāt also in subsequent works.
not Aristotelian (the proof based on the division of existence into necessary and possible), in the *Išaḥyāyā Avicenna opts for a proof of God's existence that is both metaphysical and Aristotelian.

3. AVERROES

Together with the doctrine of the transcendentials, the theory of a metaphysical proof of God's existence is the area of Avicenna's philosophy that Averroes criticizes most. Even though Averroes finds this doctrine in other authors, and acknowledges that these


50. Ibn Rushd, *Tafsir ma bād al-Tahāfāt [= Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics, A 5 [= book A, commen. 5], ed. M. Bouyges, Imprimerie Catholique, Beyrouth 1958-1968, 462-463. Alexander says: This is so because the demonstration of the principles of the existents, regardless of what we are, is exclusive competence of first philosophy. These [principles] are those that the physicist uses without classifying them, but taking them for granted. This is so because the insubstantial substance is principle and cause of natural things, and this [substance] is the one about which Aristotle here primarily discusses. [...] What Alexander says in this place has to be [carefully] considered, since his statement "the demonstration of the principles of the existents belong only to the first philosopher, not to the master of the science" and "the physicist takes these [principles] for granted, since the substance that is insubstantial is principle and cause of natural things, and this [substance] is the one about which Aristotle here primarily discusses [...]" contains a difficulty (cp. C. Gersenquin, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics. A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics, Book A, Brill, Leiden 1984, 72-73; A. Martin, Averroës, *Grand Commentaire de la Metaphysique d'Aristote (Tafsir ma bād al-Tahāfāt). Livre Lam-Lamb al-Ṭabarī et annoté, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1984, 59-60; *Aristotelis Opera, vol. VIII, 292 K-M). Averroës provides what follows a lengthy and detailed discussion of the reported doctrine. In the Arab tradition, doctrines by other authors, like Philoponus, are ascribed to Alexander of Aphrodisias (see A. Hasnawi, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise vs Jean Philon: Notes sur quelques textes d'Alexandre "prêches" en grec conservés en arabe, *Arsab Sciences and Philosophy, 4 [1994], 51-109). Averroës, among others, is a case in point (see R. Soralji, *Infinite powers impressed: the transformation of Aristotle's physics and theology, in *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentator and Their Influence, ed. R. Soralji, Duckworth, London 1990, 188, 190-194).

51. Ibn Rushd, *Tafsir ma bād al-Tahāfāt, A 5, 1423-1422; 1428 m. 4. As to Avicenna, since he believed in the truth of the statement "no science demonstrates its own principles" and took it absolutely, he believed that the master of first philosophy is the one who takes care of clarifying the existence of the principles of sensible (either eternal or non-eternal) substance. He said that the master of natural science takes somehow for granted that nature exists, whereas the master of the divine science is the one who demonstrates its existence, [...] This is what must be understood about this statement [by Alexander], lest it be very doubtful. This [Alexander; or his statement] is the one who made Avicenna go astray (cp. Gersenquin, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics, 74-75; Martin, Averroës, *Grand Commentaire, 65-66; *Aristotelis Opera, vol. VIII, 253 D, E). The reference to Avicenna in A 5. is recalled in A 6, 1436 a (Aristotelis Opera, vol. VIII, 295 D).
P2. For the sake of brevity, I call these two approaches to the subject-matter of metaphysics, respectively, "theological" and "ontological".

Let us start with Averroes' use of Pr against Avicenna in his Long Commentary on the Physics (1186), a text whose Arabic original is apparently lost.52

Text 6: Averroes, Long Commentary on the Physics A.83 (Aristotelis Opera, vol. IV, 47 F-R)
[a] Therefore, the study of forms belongs to two sciences. One, namely natural science, takes into account material forms. The other takes into account simple forms abstract from matter. This latter is the science that investigates being as such. [b] It must be noticed that the existence of this genus of beings, i.e. [the genus of beings] separate from matter, is shown only in this natural science. [c] Whoever contends that first philosophy tries to show the existence of separate beings, is wrong. For these beings are the subject-matter of first philosophy, and it is maintained in the Posterior Analytics (= Pr) that no science can show the existence of its own subject-matter, but takes its existence for granted, either because it is evident by itself, or because it is demonstrated in another science. [d] Therefore Avicenna made a greatest mistake as he said that the first philosopher demonstrates the First Principle's existence. On this issue, in his book on divine science, he proceeded according to a method that he regarded as necessary and essential in this science. His mistake, however, is evident, since the most certain of the statements that he employed in this [regard] does not exist.

52. Averroes adopts Pr also in other works and contexts: see Averrois Car nobemens comemntarium magnum in Aristotelis De Anima libris, ed. J. Stuart Crawford. The Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge (Mass.) 1953. Bk 2, 106c9—107a2: "Artifex enim non posset demonstrare subiculum suae artis neque species illius subjecti; Ibn Ruld, Tahrir al-Maihib al-Tahiri, cit., E.1, 702a14: "Demonstrations regard only the essential realities belonging to the genus investigated by that discipline, neither the genus itself of the discipline, nor any one of its species" (Aristotelis Opera, vol. VIII, 144 E 1: "demonstrations non sunt nisi ad res esseant essentiae in illo genere de quo consideratur illa art, non ad genuum ipsius artis, neque ad species eius"). In Averroes Car nobemens comemntarium magnum libri De incet et mundi Aristotelis, ed. F. J. Crouwely, R. Ammon, 2 vols., Leuvena 2003. A. 30, 744a99, Averroes takes into account the possibility of a demonstration quia of the existence of a species of the subject-matter (in the case at hand, the existence of fire), remarking, however, that this possibility is rare ("est haec est demonstratio quia ad probandum alicuam speciem esse, et hoc rare contingit in hac scientia").

Averroes and Averroes on the Proof of God's Existence P2. For the sake of brevity, I call these two approaches to the subject-matter of metaphysics, respectively, "theological" and "ontological".

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Principle Pr is explicitly mentioned in section [c] and implicitly resumed in section [f]. The crucial point of section [c] is the contention that metaphysics is not entitled to prove the existence of immaterial beings, since these latter are its subject-matter, and the existence of the subject-matter of a discipline cannot be proved by the discipline itself (according to Pr). The contention that the subject-matter of metaphysics are the immaterial beings is based on Aristotle's statement that Averroes is explaining (As for the formal principle, whether such principles are one or many, and of what sort or sorts they are, are questions to be treated in detail in first philosophy, so we may leave them aside until we come to that s, A. 9, 192a 34-35), and on the idea - stemming from the passage of the Posterior Analytics in which Pr is enunciated - that, if metaphysics proves something about immaterial things, these latter must be its subject-matter. Section [c] justifies the contention in [b] (only physics proves the existence of immaterial beings).

Sections [b] and [c] together explain the main point of section [f]: if physics did not prove the existence of immaterial beings, metaphysics as a science would not exist, since the existence of its-sub-
ject matter would not be proved by any science. The remaining sections of Text 6, however, are problematic. In sections [a] and [e], contrarily to what he does in [c], Averroes describes the scope of investigation of metaphysics along ontological, rather than theological, lines: metaphysics is described there as “the science that considers being simpliciter, i.e. qua being.”

On the other hand, the refutation of Avicenna’s thesis in section [d] (metaphysics proves God’s existence) is not accompanied by an adequate statement assessing that physics replaces metaphysics in proving God’s existence: Averroes simply states that physics proves the existence of the genus of beings to which God belongs (the immaterial beings), not of God himself. This impression of a certain incongruence between what Averroes criticizes about Avicenna and what he positively argues is confirmed by other passages of the Long Commentary on the Physics. The physical proof of God’s existence that Averroes propounds in his writings, and its degree of coherence with the criticism of Avicenna on the issue, cannot be investigated here. What follows, I will focus instead on Averroes’ wavering conception of the subject-matter of metaphysics.

55. Especially in the case of section [c], this description is quite surprising, not only because it does not fit with the contention in section [c], but also because Averroes’ point in [c] would have been better argued for if metaphysics, as a science more noble than physics, had been portrayed as dealing with a more noble kind of beings, i.e. the separate beings mentioned in section [c].

56. Averroes’ commentary on Physics B, 1, 194b 14-15 (What it is which is separable, and how things are with it, it is the work of first philosophy to determine) (Engl. transl. in Aristotle’s Physics, Books I and II, 29) also contains a criticism of Avicenna conducted on the basis of [b] (see Aristotle’s Opuscula, vol. IV, a.26, b.9]. At the end of this passage, Averroes makes clear that physics clarifies the existence of the first of the immaterial forms (he possibly means the Active Intellect), or of the forms that are intermediate between the material and the immaterial ones (man’s intellect).

57. Significantly, Davidson (Proof of Eternity, 237 and notes 10-13) mentions only passages of the Long Commentary and of the Epitome of the Metaphysics as evidence of Averroes’ proof of God’s existence from motion. If confirmed, the presence of Averroes’ proof only in his exegesis of the Metaphysics might imply that his rejection of Avicenna’s doctrine of a proof of God’s existence pertaining only to metaphysics was not absolute.

An ontological, rather than theological, consideration of the subject-matter of metaphysics surfaced also in Averroes’ rejection of Avicenna’s interpretation of P3 in the Long Commentary on the Physics.

Text 7: Averroes, Long Commentary on the Physics B.22 (Aristotelis Opera, vol. IV, 66 M-72B)
[a] Avicenna contends that the natural philosopher speaks exclusively of the matter that is proximate to any being, and that only the first philosopher takes first matter into account. [b] He was right. As he heard in the Posterior Analytics [= P3.1] that no matter of a discipline demonstrates the causes of the subject-matter that he takes into account—since, if he did demonstrate them by means of things that are prior to these causes, [the demonstration] would pertain to a superior genus, and thus, the clarification would belong to a superior discipline different from the present one, which takes into account the genus that contains the subject-matter of this discipline—as he heard this, he regarded it as impossible in all the three ways of demonstration, i.e. demonstration quia, and demonstration proper quid. [c] But this is not so. For this is impossible only in a demonstration as such, and in a demonstration proper quid. In a demonstration quia, on the contrary, it is not impossible, as Aristotle did with regard to the demonstration of the first matter and the First Mover in this book. If this [demonstration quia in general] concerns proper accidents of the [natural] being, it will be a demonstration pertaining to natural philosophy. If, on the other hand, it will concern proper accidents of being as such, it will be a demonstration pertaining to metaphysics. [d] It is evident that first matter cannot be properly shown to be existent except by means of a proof in natural philosophy [Lat. signum naturale, As. dolid tabib’ih].
[e] [Also] the First Mover cannot be shown to be existent except by means of a proof in natural philosophy [Lat. signum naturale, As. dolid tabib’ih].
[f] The method followed by Averroes in proving [the existence of the First Principle is the method of the Islamic theologians [Lat. iocomensia, Ar. mutakallimun]. His statements are always found to be intermediate between Peripatetics and Islamic theologians (emphasis added).

The targets of Averroes’ criticism in this case are two doctrines of Avicenna: not only the metaphysical proof of God’s existence (in section [f]), but also the metaphysical proof of the existence of prime matter (in section [a]). The root of the disagreement is the interpretation of principle P3 in section [b]. In this section, P3 is mentioned by Averroes according to the version P3.1, possibly
by means of Matta’s translation of the Posterior Analytics, known, at least in part, to Averroes. Averroes shares with Avicenna (see above, Text 3) also the consideration of the “principles” mentioned in P3 as causes of the subject-matter (he explicitly calls them “causes”). Unlike Avicenna, however, Averroes takes P3.1 to exclude a demonstration as such and a demonstration proper quid, not a demonstration quia of the principles of a science (section [c]).

Hence, according to Averroes, the physicist can prove the existence of the causes of his own subject-matter, i.e. first matter and the First Mover, with a demonstration quia (this is probably the meaning of “proof” in sections [d]-[e]; see above, Text 3 [c]). At the end of section [c], the characterization of the metaphysical demonstration as regarding the proper accidents of ens simpliciter is problematic: since a demonstration concerns the proper accidents of the subject-matter of the science by which it is performed (see above, P3 and parallel places), the subject-matter of metaphysics is, according to section [c], “being as such” (i.e. “being quia being”), rather than the separate beings.

The tension between an ontological and a theological view of the subject-matter of metaphysics is not exclusive to the Long Commentary on the Physics. It is visible, for example, also in Averroes’ Epitome of the Metaphysics. In this work, in order to reject Avicenna’s metaphysical proof of God’s existence, Averroes includes the separate principles under the rubric of “subject-matter” of metaphysics, but he also states explicitly that this same

as he takes for granted the number of the modes of movement (reading al-manqif, instead of al-siqq) of the mover from the discipline of mathematical astronomy. [c] What has manifest in the natural science about the existence of separate principles is not superficial in this science, as Avicenna says, but rather necessary, [d] since this science employs that (i.e. these principles) as hypothesis (lit.: “supposed basis”, ad maqru’). [e] and since they are one of the parts of its subject-matter (badd al-dafa’ maqal al-wahid). [f] It has appeared clearly from what has been said what the goal and what the subject-matters (maqalat) of this science are (Ibn Ruml, Compendio de Metafisica, ed. and transl. C. Quiros Rodriguez, Madrid 1999, repr. Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science a the J.W. Goethe University, Frankfurt a.M. 1999, 8.4 emphasis added; critical edition in preparation by R. Armbrust). In this text the concept of “subject-matter” appears to be used in a non-technical way, with the meaning of “theme”, as the mentions of “subject-matter”, in the plural, in sections [c]-[f] attest. The description of the separate principles of one of the subject-matters of metaphysics in section [e] preludes to the doctrine of Text 6 [e]. Section [c] refers probably to Avicenna’s Text 4 [b].

As in the preliminary section, Averroes contends: [a] Since in the natural science other principles that are not in matter and do not exist in a certain way, but rather in an absolute way, have become manifest, their investigation must necessarily belong to a common discipline (sirada’s tamilya) that investigates “existent” in an absolute way. [b] For there are common things that encompass sensible and nonsensible things (like unity and multiplicity, potency and act, and other such common attributes), and, in general, [there are] the attributes that pertain to sensible things regarded as existent (this is the regard proper of separate things, as we will clarify later). [c] Thus, no discipline can investigate such things other than the discipline whose subject-matter is “existent” (reading al-manqif instead of al-siqq, “existence”) in an absolute way (Ibn Ruml, Compendio de Metafisica, 6.0-7.0, emphasis added). The view of the subject-matter of metaphysics in section [a] and [c] is clearly ontological. The mention of the common discipline in section [a] documents that P3.2 lies in the background of Averroes’ position on this issue. Averroes’ assertion in section [b] that the consideration of a sensible thing simply as existent is tantamount to its consideration as immaterial, is regarded by Davidson, Proof for Eternity, 333, as an “harmonization” of the ontological and theological description of the subject-matter of metaphysics. In fact, Averroes does not appear to original in this regard, since he refers probably to Avicenna’s doctrine in Alhakim I, 2, 534a 534b, according to which “existent qua existent” is, in principle, immaterial, since it applies not only to material, but also to immaterial realities (see Bertolacci, The Reception, 269).
metaphysics. Thus, we might envisage an evolution from a still partially Avicennian position in the Epitome of the Metaphysics (in which Avicenna's metaphysical proof of God's existence is discarded, but the function of subject-matter of metaphysics is formally ascribed to the "existent qua existent") to a more marked anti-Avicennian position in the Long Commentary on the Physics (in which the role of subject-matter of metaphysics is explicitly assigned to the separate existents, despite some remnants of the previous ontological view on the issue).

But this scenario is excluded by the inspection of Averroes' Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics. This commentary is coeval with the one on the Physics (it was probably written only a few years before, ca. 1180), and belongs to the same literary genre. The first book of the Posterior Analytics is commented by Averroes according to the Arabic anonymous translation, whereas the second according to Matta's translation. The Arabic original of the first part of Averroes' commentary (the exegesis of An. Post. A, 1-23) has been recently discovered and published. In this commentary, however, the subject-matter of metaphysics is characterized in opposite ways. Let us start with its theological characterization.

Text 8: Averroes, Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics A100 (Averroes [1988], 299-301, Aristotelis Opera, vol. 124, 230 C-E)

There exists another kind of interaction between a lower and a higher discipline, like the cooperation that occurs between the disciplines of mathematics and the divine science. For the physicist, provides to the master of the divine science [the proof of the fact that there are existents separated from matter, and the mathematician provides [to him the determination of their number on account of the [heavenly] motions; the divine [philosopher], for his part, investigates their substances and all that pertains to them. Thus, many issues that the divine science analyses are solved by means of what is clarified in the natural science. [b] This kind of cooperation, however, is not the one that Aristotle points at. For in our case, the posterior discipline is the one that provides to the anterior discipline the subject-matter which this latter investigates, whereas in the other case [as in Aristotle] the anterior discipline provides to the posterior discipline the cause which is like the form of the thing investigated by the posterior discipline (emphasis added).

In this text, Averroes comments on Aristotle's doctrine (An. Post. A, 13, 78b 34-79a 2) according to which an inferior science provides to a superior science the proof of a fact, and the superior science provides the explanation, i.e. the cause of this fact, as it happens, for example, between optics and geometry. To what Aristotle says Averroes adds his own view of the relationship between natural philosophy and metaphysics: the former provides to the latter the proof of the existence of the separate realities, and the latter studies the nature of these existents. Significantly, in section [b] Averroes calls these existents the "subject-matter" of the superior science (in the case at hand, of metaphysics), as he does in the Long Commentary on the Physics (Text 6 [a]).

But in another passage of the same commentary we find a statement going in the opposite direction: "existent", says Averroes, is the subject-matter of metaphysics. This passage is revealing, because it shows that principle P3.2 is the origin of Averroes' point of view in this case.


[a] [...] [A]vicenna [...] thought that the master of the natural science takes for granted from the master of the divine science first matter and the First Mover. [b] Aristotle, however, does not mean that the master of the particular science cannot demonstrate the causes of his own subject-matter in

63. Reading al-madda al-ālā instead of bi-l-madda al-ālā (to the first matter).
any way, but only that he cannot demonstrate the causes of his own subject-matter by means of an absolute demonstration (burhān mutlaq), i.e., by means of a demonstration that provides the cause and the existence. This [i.e., the impossibility of an absolute demonstration] is so because the causes of the subject-matter of the [particular] discipline belong to a higher nature, namely a nature that represents the genus of that subject-matter, and the investigation of this nature pertains only to the master of the divine sciences; this happens because the nature that is common to the subject-matters of the particular disciplines is "existent," which is the subject-matter of metaphysics. Therefore [Aristotle] started saying [= P3.2]: "The common discipline takes upon itself the task of clarifying the other principles," and then explained this statement by saying: "If this is so, then it is clear and evident that the master of a particular discipline cannot clarify the proper principles of his own discipline," namely: by means of an absolute clarification, i.e., a clarification that provides the cause and the existence. For the master of the particular discipline can demonstrate the causes of his own subject-matter by means of proofs (dāla'il), as Aristotle does in the clarification of first matter in the Physics and of the First Mover. [c] There is no way to clarify the existence of the First Mover except by means of a proof (dāla'il) in this science, namely natural science, contrariwise of what Avicenna thought. We have devoted a treatise to clarify the falsity of the universal method by means of which, according to Avicenna, the master of the divine science can establish the existence of the First Principle (emphasis added).66

In order to guarantee the possibility of a physical proof of God's existence, Averroes has to add some qualifications to P3.2. According to him, Aristotle would exclude only a demonstration propter quid (and, a fortiori, an "absolute" demonstration) of the "causes" (i.e. of both the epistemological and the ontological principles) of physics by physics itself; thus, this discipline can provide a demonstration quia

66. In section [c], the mention of the "universal method" (al-farṣa al-buḥūl) by means of which Avicenna aims at proving God's existence, probably echoes the similar expression in Avicenna's Text 5 [b]. This and other cases of almost verbatim quotations (see above, notes 60-65), the mentions of the titles of Avicenna's works, and the wide range of doctrines by Avicenna criticized, appear to dispute Davidson's contention (Proofs for Eternity, 334) that Averroes knew Avicenna's philosophy only by means of derivative reports and incomplete copies of Avicenna's works. (I deal in detail with this topic in the paper "The Andalusian Revert Against Avicenna's Metaphysics: Averroes' Criticism of Avicenna in the Long Commentary on the Metaphysics," presented at the 14th annual symposium of the SEPM Averroists, l'Avocrine, l'Avierrrisme, Genève, 4-6 October 2006).

("proof") of God, meant as ultimate cause of its subject-matter. But P3.2 forces Averroes to explain the universality of the "common discipline" mentioned therein, namely of metaphysics, on account of the universality of its subject-matter, which can only be "existent qua existent".

Texts 8-9 are important, because they bring to the fore the ambivalent conception of the subject-matter of metaphysics, whose traces we have detected in Averroes' Long Commentary on the Physics, and show that this ambivalence is in no way "accidental" (due, for example, to an imperfect revision of Averroes' previously accepted, as it happens in other works by Averroes). It rather depends on a precise theoretical reason: in order to reject Avicenna's doctrine of the proof of God's existence provided by metaphysics, Averroes has to assume God as the subject-matter of metaphysics. But this theological view of the subject-matter of metaphysics conflicts with principle P3.2 of the Posterior Analytics.

We would expect to find a solution of this issue in Averroes' Long Commentary on the Metaphysics. For Aristotle too in the Metaphysics oscillates between an ontological and a theological view of the theme of metaphysics, and this oscillation might have given Averroes the opportunity to clarify his understanding of the issue. The Long Commentary on the Metaphysics, however, does not fulfill this expectation. For nowhere does Averroes settle the question of what the subject-matter of metaphysics precisely is, whether "existent qua existent" or rather God and the divine. Averroes does not deal ex professo with this issue: scattered references to the subject-matter of metaphysics can be found here and there, but these remarks oscillate once again between an ontological and a theological perspective. Significantly, his commentary on the famous aporia at the end of book E (how can metaphysics be universal if it deals with immaterial divine realities?) is just a paraphrase of Aristotle's cryptic text. The reasons why he does not tackle the problem (whether he saw no

67. Ibn Rusd, Ta'rif ma ḏal al-falāʾis, B.1, 1976 (the subject-matter of dialectic and metaphysics is "the absolute existence", al-maṣūfīd al-mutlaq); 2:11, 935-936 (the subject-matter proper to first philosophy is "the separate entities", al-umur al-nuṣūfīqa, and the divine entities, al-umur al-dīnārīya). Cf. 1:4, 397-.
need to settle the “technical” question of the subject-matter of metaphysics, and no contradiction in understanding the theme of this discipline according to both theological and ontological lines, or other) have to be further investigated.

To sum up: Averroes is quite firm in discarding Avicenna’s metaphysical proof of God’s existence (Texts 6-7, 9). Less consistent are his views on the subject-matter of metaphysics: sometimes he assigns this function to the separate divine substances (Texts 6, 8), sometimes to “existent qua existent” (Texts 7, 9). The reason for this tension in Averroes’ thought is clear enough. The characterization of the subject-matter of metaphysics along theological lines is instrumental to reject, on the basis of principle P3 of the Posterior Analytics, Avicenna’s doctrine of metaphysics as the discipline that provides the proof of God’s existence. The ontological view of this same subject-matter, on the other hand, is a consequence of the adoption of principle P3.2. On the one side, this latter warrants, properly interpreted, the claim of physics to prove God’s existence. On the other side, however, it conveys an image of metaphysics as universal science which is compatible only with “existent qua existent” as its subject-matter. This oscillation is determined by the main aims of Averroes’ philosophy — his antagonism towards Avicenna, and his faithfulness to Aristotle — and receives no explicit explanation by Averroes himself.

68. The statement occurring in D3.1.349a, the First knows the nature of existent qua existent in an absolute way, which is Himself [or: His essence]; see Th. A. Druart, Averroes on God’s Knowledge of Being Qua Being, «Anaque des Estudios Arabes», 4 [1991], 39-57 might suggest a position in which existent qua existent coincides ultimately with the divine by means of successive “focal reductions” (from existent qua existent to substance, from substance to form, from form to God as first form; see Th. A. Druart, Metaphysics, in The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy, ed. P. Adamson, B. Taylor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, 346: “Averroes considers that the subject matter of metaphysics is being qua being, whose focal meaning is substance characterized by form”). The fact remains, however, that Averroes nowhere explicitly endorses this position. Significantly, in the Long Commentary on the Metaphysics he attacks only Avicenna’s thesis that metaphysics demonstrates the existence of nature and first matter, not also the thesis that metaphysics proves the existence of God (see the text reported above, note 51, and A.V.

4. Conclusion

The present article has tried to clarify the dispute between Avicenna and Averroes on the proof of God’s existence and the subject-matter of metaphysics by underscoring three of its main aspects. First, the paramount importance of the Posterior Analytics in the Arabic reception of Aristotle: even though Avicenna and Averroes disagree on specific theoretical issues, they are unanimous in regarding the Posterior Analytics as a normative text that regulates any attempt to speak of metaphysics and the other disciplines in a scientific way. In the transmission and interpretation of this work the Arabic translations played a crucial role, sometimes introducing in its content doctrines not intended, and possibly also rejected, by Aristotle. Second, the proof of God’s existence in Avicenna’s most important metaphysical work, the Ilahiyat of the Kitab al-Majalis, is unique in Avicenna’s philosophical oeuvre: it is based on Aristotle’s Metaphysics a, 2 and the doctrine of causality therein, rather than on the analysis of the concepts of “necessary” and “contingent”, coming from previous Arabic theology and philosophy, as in the other works by Avicenna. Third, the opinio vulgaris according to which Averroes would have propounded a purely theological view of the subject-matter of metaphysics is based exclusively on the Long Commentary on the Physics and its Latin tradition, and tells only one side of the story.