

*Sonderdruck aus:*

# ALBERTUS MAGNUS

Zum Gedenken nach 800 Jahren:  
Neue Zugänge, Aspekte und Perspektiven

Herausgegeben im Auftrag  
der Dominikanerprovinz Teutonia  
durch Walter Senner OP  
unter Mitarbeit von  
Henryk Anzulewicz,  
Maria Burger, Ruth Meyer,  
Maria Nauert, Pablo C. Sicouly OP,  
Joachim Söder,  
Klaus-Bernward Springer



Akademie Verlag

## The Reception of Avicenna's "Philosophia Prima" in Albert the Great's Commentary on the "Metaphysics": The Case of the Doctrine of Unity

In Albert the Great's Commentary on Aristotle's "Metaphysics"<sup>1</sup> we encounter several quotations of the "Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina" (henceforth: *Philosophia prima*) of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, ca. 980-1037 A.D.)<sup>2</sup>. The *Philosophia prima* is the Latin translation of the metaphysical section ("Ilāhiyyāt") of the "Kitāb al-Šifā'" ("Book of the Cure"), namely of the most famous and most important philosophical *summa* Avicenna wrote, the only one that was partially translated into Latin during the Middle Ages<sup>3</sup>. In his Commentary on the "Metaphysics" Albert quotes Avicenna's *Phi-*

<sup>1</sup> All quotations of Albert the Great in the present article are taken from his *Metaph.*

<sup>2</sup> AVICENNA LATINUS: *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, I-IV. Éd. critique par Simone Van Riet. Introd. par Gerhard Verbeke. Louvain [u.a.] 1977; AVICENNA LATINUS: *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, V-X. Édition critique par Simone Van Riet. Introd. par Gerhard Verbeke. Louvain [u.a.] 1980; AVICENNA LATINUS: *Liber de Philosophia prima sive Scientia divina*, I-X. Lexiques par Simone Van Riet. Louvain-la-Neuve-Leiden 1983.

<sup>3</sup> IBN SĪNĀ: *Al-Shifā' Al-Ilāhiyyāt (1) (La Métaphysique)*, texte établi et ed. par Georges C. Anawati et Sa'id Zayed. Le Caire 1960; IBN SĪNĀ: *Al-Shifā' Al-Ilāhiyyāt (2) (La Métaphysique)*, texte établi et ed. par Mohammad Y. Moussa, Solayman Dunya et Sa'id Zayed. Le Caire 1960. Two modern integral translations of this work into Western languages are available, a German translation (*Die Metaphysik Avicennas enthaltend die Metaphysik, Theologie, Kosmologie und Ethik*, übersetzt und erläutert von Max Horten. Leipzig 1907. Repr. Frankfurt am Main 1960) and a French translation (AVICENNE: *La Métaphysique du Shifā'*. Livres I à V. Trad., introd., notes et commentaires par Georges C. Anawati. Paris 1978; AVICENNE: *La Métaphysique du Shifā'*. Livres de VI à X. Traduction, notes et commentaires par Georges C. Anawati. Paris 1985). For the Latin translations of the *Kitāb al-Šifā'* cfr. ALVERNY, Marie-Thérèse d': Notes sur les traductions médiévales d'Avicenne. In: *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 19 (1952), pp. 337-358, now in *Eadem: Avicenne en Occident*. Paris 1993. For the bibliography on Avicenna, cfr. Anawati, Georges C.: Chronique avicennienne 1951-1960. In: *Revue thomiste* 60 (1960), pp. 614-634; Idem: Bibliographie de la philosophie médiévale en terre d'Islam pour les années 1959-1969. In: *Bulletin de Philosophie médiévale* 10-12 (1968-1970), pp. 343-349; JANSSENS, Jules L.: *An Annotated Bibliography on Ibn Sīnā (1970-1989)*. Leuven 1991; Idem: *An Annotated Bibliography on Ibn Sīnā: First Supplement (1990-1994)*. Louvain-la-Neuve 1999; DRUART, Thérèse-Anne: Medieval Islamic Philosophy and Theology Bibliographical Guide (1994-1996). In: *Bulletin de Philosophie médiévale* 39 (1997), pp. 187-189.

*losophia prima* so frequently and extensively, and in so many different ways, that this work can be considered, together with the Latin translation of Averroës' (Ibn Rušd, 1126-1198 A.D.) so-called Long Commentary ("Tafsīr", literally: "Interpretation") on Aristotle's "Metaphysics" (henceforth: "Long Commentary")<sup>4</sup>, the main source of Albert's commentary.

I have given elsewhere the inventory of Albert's quotations of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*, showing their position in Albert's commentary, the parts of Avicenna's work Albert quotes and Albert's different styles of quotation.<sup>5</sup> In the present contribution I will focus on one quotation, which is particularly relevant from the doctrinal point of view. The quotation is contained in the eighth chapter of the first treatise of the commentary upon Book Δ (V) of the "Metaphysics" (henceforth: V, 1, 8). V, 1, 8 is digression (*digressio*), namely an addition and a complement to the exegesis of a portion of Aristotle's text, which Albert offers in the previous chapter (V, 1, 7). In V, 1, 7 Albert comments upon the lines 1015b16-1016b17 of "Metaphysics" Δ, 6. This latter is the chapter of Book Δ dealing with the concept of unity. In V, 1, 8 Albert quotes all the third chapter of the third treatise (henceforth: III, 3) of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*. Together with III, 3, Albert quotes also, in the same digression, a part of chapter III, 2 of Avicenna's work. From the stylistic point of view, Albert's quotation of *Philosophia prima* III, 3 (and III, 2) is what I have called an 'implicit textual quotation': Albert does not mention anywhere Avicenna's name (for this reason the quotation is implicit), and he quotes not only the doctrine, but the text itself of Avicenna's chapter (for this reason the quotation is textual). In III, 3 Avicenna establishes one of the most peculiar and controversial thesis of his work, namely the accidentality of unity. This thesis has been severely criticized by Averroës in different places of his "Long Commentary". When he quotes *Philosophia prima* III, 3, Albert introduces some modifications in Avicenna's text, in order to preserve his own reworking of Avicenna's chapter from Averroës' criticism.

In what follows I will first sketch the background of Albert's quotation, namely the controversy between Averroës and Avicenna on unity (1). I will then summarize the context and the content of the text Albert quotes, namely of chapter III, 3 of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima* (2). Finally I will analyse the changes Albert introduces in this chapter while quoting it; Albert's aim, in so doing, is to harmonize Avicenna's view on unity with Averroës' opinion, as expressed in the "Long Commentary".

<sup>4</sup> AVERROËS: *Tafsīr ma ba'd at-Tabī'at*. Texte arabe inédit établi par Maurice Bouyges, vol. 1-3. Beyrouth 1938-1948. Latin translation in *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem Commentariis (Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis VIII)*. Venetiis 1562. Repr. Frankfurt am Main 1962, ff. 1-355.

<sup>5</sup> BERTOLACCI, Amos: «Subtilius speculando». Le citazioni della *Philosophia Prima* di Avicenna nel Commento alla *Metafisica* di Alberto Magno. In: *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 9 (1998), pp. 261-339; Idem: Le citazioni implicite testuali della *Philosophia prima* di Avicenna nel Commento alla *Metafisica* di Alberto Magno: Analisi tipologica. In: *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 12 (2001), forthcoming.

## 1. The background: Averroës vs. Avicenna on unity

The Aristotelian doctrine of unity, as many other doctrines of the "Metaphysics", is not perfectly clear and consistent<sup>6</sup>. The medieval Arabic interpretation of it, in so far as Avicenna and Averroës are concerned, turns primarily around two texts of the "Metaphysics", which have been felt as, at least in part, incompatible.

The first text is a passage of Γ, 2, where Aristotle – in order to prove that 'being' and 'one' are convertible concepts, and that the species of the former (probably meaning the categories) are as many as those of the latter – states that the substance of everything is one and a being not accidentally (i.e. essentially):

Text 1 (Γ, 2, 1003 b 32-33): ἔτι δ' ἡ ἐκάστου οὐσία ἐν ἑστίν οὐ κατὰ συμβεβηκός, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ὅπερ ὄν τι<sup>7</sup> (Again, each thing's substance is one non-coincidentally; equally, it is also just what a certain kind of thing-that-is is<sup>8</sup>). wa-ayḍan naqūlu inna ḡawhara kulli wāhidin mina l-ašyā'i wāhidun lā bi-naw'i l-'aradi wa-li-dālika naqūlu inna ḡawhara kulli šay'in huwi-yatun<sup>9</sup> (We also say that the substance of everything is one not accidentally; therefore we say that the substance of everything is a being).

The second text is a passage of Δ, 6, where Aristotle states that the essence of 'one' is to be a principle of number:

<sup>6</sup> On the Aristotelian doctrine of unity cfr. BÄRTHLEIN, Karl: *Die Transzendentalienlehre der Alten Ontologie, I. Teil: Die Transzendentalienlehre im Corpus Aristotelicum*. Berlin [u.a.] 1972; BERTI, Enrico: Il problema della sostanzialità dell'essere e dell'uno nella Metafisica di Aristotele. In: Idem, *Studi Aristotelici*. L'Aquila 1974, pp. 183-184; Idem: L'uno ed i molti nella Metafisica di Aristotele. In: MELCHIORRE, Vittorio (ed.): *L'uno e i molti*. Milano 1990, pp. 155-180; COULUBARITSIS, Lambros: Le statut de l'Un dans la «Métaphysique». In: *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 90 (1992), pp. 497-521; ELDERS, Leon: *Aristotle's Theory of the One. A Commentary on Book X of the Metaphysics*. Assen 1959; HALPER, Edward: Aristotle on the Convertibility of One and Being. In: *The New Scholasticism* 59 (1985), pp. 213-227; LOUX, Michael J.: Aristotle on the Transcendentals. In: *Phronesis* 18 (1973), pp. 225-239; MAKIN, Stephen: Aristotle on Unity and Being. In: *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 214 (1988), pp. 77-103; MORRISON, Donald: The Place of Unity in Aristotle's Metaphysical Project. In: *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium* 9 (1993), pp. 131-156; RUNGALDIER, Edmund: Einheit und Identität als «formale Begriffe» in der Metaphysik des Aristoteles. In: *Theological Philosophy* 64 (1989), pp. 557-566; WHITE, Nicholas P.: Aristotle on Sameness and Oneness. In: *Philosophical Review* 80 (1971), pp. 177-197.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek of Texts 1-2 is that of *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. A rev. Text with introd. and Commentary, by William D. Ross. Oxford 1924.

<sup>8</sup> *Aristotle's Metaphysics, Books Γ, Δ and E*. Transl. with notes by Christopher Kirwan. Oxford 1971, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Arabic translation in AVERROËS [note 4]: p. 310, 11-12.

Text 2 (, 6, 1016 b 17-18): τὸ δὲ ἐνὶ εἶναι ἀρχὴν τινὴ ἐστὶν ἀριθμοῦ εἶναι. To be one is to be a kind of origin of number<sup>10</sup>. wa-anniyatu l-wāhidi hiya btidā'un mā li-l-'adadi<sup>11</sup> (The essence of 'one' is a certain principle of number).

In "Philosophia prima" III, 1 Avicenna accepts Text 2 without qualification:

Text 3: amma kawnuhū mabda'a li-l-'adadi fa-amrun qarībun mina l-muta'ammili<sup>12</sup> (That ['one'] is the principle of number is something easy [to understand] for the person who reflects [upon it]). Quod autem [sc. unum] initium sit numeri bene consideranti facile est intelligere<sup>13</sup>.

According to Avicenna, a consequence of Text 2 is that unity is an accident. For number belongs to one of the nine accidental categories, namely quantity; its principle, therefore, i.e. unity, has to be an accident too. Avicenna devotes chapter III, 3, as we will shortly see, to this implication of Text 2.

But if the validity of Text 2 and of its implications is granted, then Text 1, in Avicenna's view, cannot be taken literally. For, if unity is an accident, as Text 2 implies, it cannot be an essential feature of the substance of everything. Consequently, in a passage of "Philosophia prima" VII, 1, which can be considered Avicenna's own reformulation of Text 1, every allusion to the essential relationship between the substance of each thing, on the one hand, and unity and being, on the other, disappears:

Text 4: wa-kullu šay'in fa-lahū wuğūdun wāhidun<sup>14</sup> (Everything has a being which is one). Nam quicquid est, unum est<sup>15</sup>.

In a famous section of the "Long Commentary", in the context of the exegesis of Text 1, Averroës criticizes Avicenna for his interpretation of Text 1 and Text 2. In Averroës' opinion, in fact, these two texts do not refer to the same kind of 'one':

Text 5: wa-minhā annahū zanna anna hādā l-wāhida l-maḡūla 'alā ḡamī'i l-maḡūlāti huwa l-wāhidu llaḡī huwa mabda'u l-'adadi wa-l-'adadu 'araḡu fa-'taqada anna sma l-wāhidi yadullu mina l-mawḡūdāti 'alā 'araḡin wa-l-wāhidu llaḡī huwa mabda'u l-'adadi innamā huwa mina l-mawḡūdāti llaḡī

<sup>10</sup> ARISTOTELES: *Metaph.*: transl. Kirwan [note 8], p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Arabic translation in AVERROËS [note 4], p. 543, 13.

<sup>12</sup> IBN SĪNĀ: *Al-Shifā' Al-Ilāhiyyāt (1)* [note 3], p. 96, 1.

<sup>13</sup> AVICENNA: *Liber de Philosophia prima, I-IV* [note 2]: p. 107, 69-70.

<sup>14</sup> IBN SĪNĀ: *Al-Shifā' Al-Ilāhiyyāt (2)* [note 3], p. 303, 7-8.

<sup>15</sup> AVICENNA: *Liber de Philosophia prima, V-X* [note 2]: p. 349, 12. Avicenna probably reformulates Text 1 talking into account passages of the "Metaphysics" such as Z, 16, 1040 b 21-24, and I, 2, 1053 b 21-26, where Aristotle denies the substantiality of 'being' and 'one'.

yuḡālu 'alayhā smu l-wāhidi wa-in kāna aḡaḡuḡā bi-hādā<sup>16</sup> (Again, [Avicenna went astray] since he thought that this 'one' which is said of all categories was the 'one' which is the principle of number; but number is an accident; hence he believed that the name 'one' meant, among beings, an accident. Rather, the 'one' which is the principle of number is only one of the beings of which the name 'one' is said, even though it is worthier than those of that [i.e. of being called 'one']). Et etiam, quia existimavit, quod unum dictum de omnibus praedicamentis, est illud unum, quod est principium numerorum. Numerus autem est accidens. Unde opinatus est iste, quod hoc nomen unum significat accidens in entibus: et non intellexit, quod unum, quod est principium numerorum, est ex entibus, de quibus dicitur hoc nomen unum, licet sit magis dignum hoc<sup>17</sup>.

This text makes clear that Averroës does not assume Text 2 without qualifications. He thinks that the 'one' mentioned in it by Aristotle is not the 'one' *tout court* – as it appears from Aristotle's statement – but only a particular kind of 'one' (albeit the most important). Hence, according to Averroës, what is true about the 'one' dealt with in Text 2 – i.e. its being the principle of number and, consequently, the accidentality of its unity – cannot be transferred to the 'one' dealt with in Text 1. This latter concerns not a special instance of 'one', but the 'one' which is universally predicable of all categories (in other words, it concerns the transcendental 'one').

A thorough discussion of the validity of Avicenna's and Averroës' interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of 'one' and unity lies outside the boundaries of the present contribution. Both Avicenna and Averroës accept a presupposition which makes Text 1 and Text 2 mutually incompatible, namely the necessity for the principle of an accident (in this case, the principle of number) to be itself an accident. Both of them modify substantially the doctrine of one of the two aforementioned Aristotelian texts, in order to eliminate the supposed discordance between them: as we have seen, Avicenna modifies Text 1 (cfr. Text 4), Averroës does the same with Text 2 (cfr. Text 5).

An attentive evaluation of the correctness of Averroës' criticism of Avicenna's doctrine of 'one' and unity exceeds the limits of this contribution as well. Averroës is often charged of having misunderstood Avicenna's intentions, transferring on a ontological plan what Avicenna says on a purely logical level<sup>18</sup>. But, as far as the doctrine of the accidentality of unity is concerned, Avicenna himself seems to interweave the logical analysis with the ontological investigation. This, at least, is what results from chapter III, 3 of the *Philosophia prima*, whose target is to prove the ontological accidentality of unity. In this chapter, Avicenna himself passes from the ontological plan – where unity is an accident – to the logical one – where the predication of 'one' is the predication of an accidental – and *vice versa*. In addition, sometimes he does not clearly distinguish

<sup>16</sup> AVERROËS [note 4]: p. 314, 7-11.

<sup>17</sup> *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII* [note 4], fol. 67<sup>D</sup>-E.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. ALONSO ALONSO, Manuel: Accidente, accidental y número según Avicena. In: *Al-Andalus* 28 (1963), pp. 117-154, especially pp. 146-154.

'unity' – the ontological accident – from 'one' – the logical accidental, and mentions the former in contexts where only the latter would be fit.

What is of interest here is that in Albert's reworking of *Philosophia prima* III, 3 (namely of Avicenna's proof of the accidentality of unity) Averroës' distinction between the two different meanings of 'one', as expressed in Text 5, plays a fundamental role.

## 2. The source of Albert's quotation: Avicenna, "Philosophia prima" III, 3

In the third treatise of the *Philosophia prima*, Avicenna deals with three of the non-substantial categories (quantity, quality and relation), aiming at showing their accidentality. Chapters III, 2-6 take into account the category of quantity. Among them, chapters III, 2-3 focus on the concept of 'one', which Avicenna regards as the principle of quantity. Chapter III, 2 establishes the different ways according to which 'one' can be understood. Chapter III, 3, on the other hand, focuses on the essence of 'one' and on the accidental nature of unity. The accidentality of unity is propedeutic – 'one' being the principle of quantity – to the proof of the accidentality of quantity. The accidentality of unity is an essential element of Avicenna's doctrine of universals (*Philosophia prima* V, 1-2), according to which a nature is one or many (as it is universal or particular) by accident<sup>19</sup>.

Chapter III, 3 of the *Philosophia prima*<sup>20</sup> can be divided into two parts. In the first part (§ 1), Avicenna shows the impossibility of defining, properly speaking, the concepts of 'one', multiplicity and number. Avicenna deals, first of all, with the concepts of 'one' and multiplicity (§ 1.1), mentioning one pseudo-definition of 'one' (§ 1.1.1) and three pseudo-definitions of multiplicity (§§ 1.1.2-4). The impossibility of properly defining these concepts is due, according to Avicenna, to the fact that in the pseudo-definition of 'one' ('the one cannot be divided') the notion of multiplicity is ultimately required (since to be divided is to be multiplied), whereas in the pseudo-definitions of multiplicity ('multiplicity is the compound of unities', 'multiplicity is made of unities', 'multiplicity is what is counted by means of the one') the notion of 'one', or notions reducible to the notion of multiplicity itself, are employed. Avicenna explains that this interference between the pseudo-definitions of 'one' and multiplicity takes place since 'one' is more known to the intellect, whereas multiplicity is more known to the imagination (§ 1.2). Avicenna takes into account, then, the case of number (§ 1.3), of which he reports two pseudo-definitions (§§ 1.3.1-2). The situation of number with regard to

<sup>19</sup> Albert quotes *Philosophia prima* V, 1-2 in the digressions *Metaph.*, I, V, tr. 6, c. 5-7.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. IBN SĪNĀ: *Al-Shifā'. Al-Ilāhiyyāt (I)* [note 3], pp. 104-110; AVICENNA: *Liber de Philosophia prima, I-IV* [note 2]: pp. 114-122.

definition is similar to that of 'one' and multiplicity, since in the pseudo-definitions of number we encounter either the notion of multiplicity, which, according to Avicenna, is identical to number, or other notions which can be reconducted to the notion of multiplicity. At the end of the first part of the chapter (§ 1.4), Avicenna says that of 'one', multiplicity and number only material descriptions, not formal definitions, can be given.

In the second part of the chapter (§ 2), Avicenna shows that number is an accident. According to him, number is an accident since its principle, namely unity, is an accident too (§ 2.1). The proof of the accidentality of unity is given in two demonstrations. The first demonstration (§ 2.1.1) has both an ontological and a logical dimension. In it Avicenna considers unity in the context of predication, referring to what he has already established in the Commentary on Porphyry's "Eisagoge", and derives from its role in this context some conclusions about its ontological status. The structure of Avicenna's argument is the following: (1) unity cannot be predicated of a substance as its genus or its differentia, since (2) it is not a part of the quiddity of a substance, but rather a concomitant of it. (3) The predication of unity is, therefore, the predication of an 'accidental'. (4) Unity is an accident. Propositions (1) and (3) belong to the logical plan; propositions (2) and (4) to the ontological one. At the logical level, Avicenna evidently means the predication of 'one' when he speaks of the predication of unity.

The second demonstration (§ 2.1.2) has a strong ontological character. In it Avicenna takes into account unity with regard to its existence. The demonstration has the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*: Avicenna proves that unity is an accident since from the hypothesis that it exists in separation from a substance (being consequently itself a substance) absurd consequences follow. The second part of the chapter ends with the answer to an objection (§ 2.1.3) and with the conclusion, where, from the accidentality of unity, Avicenna infers the accidentality of number (§ 2.2).

The content of chapter III, 3 can be summarized in the following diagram<sup>21</sup>:

Title (p. 114, 21-23)

§ 1 Difficulties in the definition of 'one', multiplicity and number (pp. 114, 24-117, 79):

§ 1.1 The cases of 'one' and multiplicity (pp. 114, 24-115, 40):

§ 1.1.1 Pseudo-definition of 'one' (p. 114, 24-29)

§ 1.1.2 First pseudo-definition of multiplicity (pp. 114, 29-115, 34)

§ 1.1.3 Second pseudo-definition of multiplicity (p. 115, 34-36)

§ 1.1.4 Third pseudo-definition of multiplicity (p. 115, 36-40)

§ 1.2 'One' is prior in the intellect, multiplicity is prior in the imagination (pp. 115, 41-116, 54)

§ 1.3 The case of number (pp. 116, 55-117, 75):

§ 1.3.1 First pseudo-definition of number (p. 116, 55-65)

<sup>21</sup> Page numbers are those of the critical edition of the Latin translation.

- § 1.3.2 Second pseudo-definition of number (pp. 116, 66-117, 75)
- § 1.4 Conclusion of the first part (p. 117, 75-79)
- § 2 Number is an accident (pp. 117, 80-122, 71):
- § 2.1 Unity is an accident (pp. 117, 80-121, 52):
- § 2.1.1 First demonstration (pp. 117, 80-118, 93)
- § 2.1.2 Second demonstration (pp. 118, 94-121, 52)
- § 2.1.3 Objection and answer (pp. 121, 53-122, 69)
- § 2.2 If unity is an accident, also number is an accident (p. 122, 69-71)

Chapter III, 3 of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima* has no correspondence in Aristotle. Albert quotes implicitly almost all of it in the digression V, 1, 8, which represents a sort of paraphrase of Avicenna's text. In quoting chapter III, 3, Albert recasts its overall structure, omits or adds some short sections and changes on occasion the content of the sections he quotes. I have described in detail elsewhere the method that Albert adopts in the quotation of this chapter<sup>22</sup>. What is of interest here are the modifications he imposes on Avicenna's doctrine of unity.

### 3. The differences between the doctrine of 'one' and unity in Avicenna's chapter III, 3 and in Albert's digression V, 1, 8.

When quoting the title of Avicenna's chapter and sections § 1.1.1, § 1.3.2 and § 2.2 of it, Albert emphasizes that the discussion does not concern 'one' and unity in general, but only that particular kind of 'one' and unity which is the principle of number. He does so by means of some significant additions, which I report in italics in the three following texts:

Text 6 (l. V, tr. 1, c. 8: p. 227, 41-43; cfr. Avicenna, title): Et est digressio declarans quiditatem unius, *secundum quod est principium numeri* [italics mine].

Text 7 (Loc. cit.: p. 227, 44-228, 8; cfr. Avicenna, § 1.1.1, § 1.3.2): Unum autem praeter omnes inductos modos sumptum est id *quod est principium numeri*. ... Per omnia igitur inducta patet, quod difficile valde est invenire quiditatem unius, *secundum quod est numeri principium*, cum tamen hoc sit unius esse proprium, *quod est principium numeri esse*. Et cum numerus sit accidens, oportet ipsum unum *quod est principium numeri*, de natura accidentis esse [italics mine].

<sup>22</sup> BERTOLACCI: Le citazioni [note 5].

Text 8 (l. IV, tr. 1, c. 8: p. 228, 50-56; cfr. Avicenna, § 2.2): Est igitur haec unitas *quae est principium numeri*, accidens. Ergo et numerus accidens, qui est collectio taliter discretorum, et est permanentiam habens in suis partibus propter indivisibilitates permanentes. Et sic inventum est verum esse unius, *quod est principium numeri*, et verum esse numeri [italics mine].

According to Avicenna, on the contrary, chapter III, 3 deals with 'one' and unity in general. This is the main difference between Albert's and Avicenna's doctrines of these concepts. In this way Albert qualifies Avicenna's doctrine of the accidentality of unity, restricting it to the case of the unity principle of number, and leaves open the possibility of the existence of other kinds of unity not having an accidental nature.

A consequence of this shift in the doctrine of unity, as documented by Texts 6-8, is observable on Albert's way of quoting the doctrine of multiplicity that Avicenna proposes in sections § 1.1.1-3 of chapter III, 3. When quoting them, Albert in several occasions presents 'number' as synonym of 'multiplicity':

Text 9 (Loc. cit.: p. 227, 47-71): Si enim dicamus sic, quod est indivisibile non habens positionem, idem erit dictum, quod unum est, quod non dividitur positione carens. Sed quod non dividitur, convertitur secundum intellectum cum hoc quod non multiplicatur, cum hoc constet quod nihil est causa *numeri et multitudinis* nisi divisio. Sic ergo dicendo *multitudo et numerus* sunt in diffinitione unius. Quod est inconveniens, cum unum sit principium, sui iteratione et aggregatione constituens *et numerum et multitudinem*. Amplius, quacumque diffinitione diffinitur *multitudo sive numerus*, semper in diffinitione illa ponitur unum. Multitudo enim est id quod aggregatur ex unis vel unitatibus. Cadit igitur unum in diffinitione *multitudinis et numeri*. Et etiam alio modo videtur peccare diffinitio, quia cum dicitur, quod *multitudo vel numerus* est aggregatum ex uno, cum aggregatum non sit aliquid aliud quam ipsa *multitudo vel numerus*, ponitur idem sub alio nomine in diffinitione sui ipsius. Amplius, si aggregatum est aliquid intelligibile et diffinibile, hoc non potest intelligi nisi per *multitudinem et numerum*, et sic ista circulariter diffiniunt se invicem [italics mine].

Following the same line of thought of Text 9, Albert transforms the third pseudo-definition of multiplicity in Avicenna (§ 1.1.4) in a pseudo-definition of number:

Text 10 (Loc. cit.: Loc. cit.: p. 227, 71-72): Si autem sic dicimus: '*numerus est multitudo numerata vel mensurata per unum*' ... [italics mine] (cfr. Avicenna, p. 115, 36-37: Item, cum dicimus quod multitudo est id quod numeratur per unum ...).

As a matter of fact, Avicenna himself states in section § 1.1.4 of chapter III, 3 that '*ipsa ... multitudo est ipse numerus*'<sup>23</sup>. But this happens incidentally and only once. Albert, on the contrary, repeats several times the identity between multiplicity and number, as we clearly see in Text 9, or presupposes it, as it is witnessed by Text 10. The reason of Al-

<sup>23</sup> AVICENNA: *Liber de Philosophia prima, I-IV* [note 2]: p. 116, 56-57.

bert's insistence may be his desire of emphasizing a thesis which can be considered a consequence of his main point, namely of the fact that 'one' is the principle of number. Since 'one', in Albert's digression, is the principle of number, multiplicity, which derives from it, can only be a number.

In Albert's quotation of the second part of chapter III, 3 there are some entire sections he adds to Avicenna's text. Among the sections that Albert adds, two are particularly relevant. The first of these is a sort of introduction to Albert's quotation of Avicenna's first demonstration of the accidentality of unity (§ 2.1.1). In it, Albert clarifies which other types of unity there are besides the unity principle of number, whose accidentality he is going to prove. Albert introduces a distinction, absent in Avicenna, between two kinds of unity, and applies only to the second of them the accidentality Avicenna establishes about unity *tout court*. The distinction Albert introduces is analogous to that Averroës establishes in Text 5 as a distinction Avicenna failed to respect:

Text 11 (I. V, tr. 1, c. 8: Loc. cit.: p. 228, 27-33): Quod autem haec [sc. unitas quae est principium numeri] sit accidens, sic probatur: Quamvis enim, sicut iam dudum diximus, unum cum ente convertatur, et ipsa forma rei terminans sit unitas ipsius, tamen ex hoc quod quodlibet sic in se terminatum est, sequitur ipsum indivisibilitas, quae secundum naturam est post esse ipsius.

The first kind of unity in Text 11 is 'the determining form itself of the thing' (*ipsa forma rei terminans*). Evidently with this expression Albert means the substantial form. But, Albert adds, in so far as determined by this form, everything has its own indivisibility (*indivisibilitas*), which is posterior to its (substantial) being. Indivisibility is the second kind of unity of Text 11. In what immediately follows Text 11, Albert proves, by quoting Avicenna's § 2.1.1, that indivisibility is an accident. Indivisibility is, therefore, the same as the unity principle of number, which Albert recalls at the beginning of Text 11<sup>24</sup>. The two kinds of unity are, hence, the unity of the substantial form (which, of course, has a substantial nature) and the unity principle of number, which is the same as the indivisibility and has an accidental character. In the digression V, 1, 8 Albert restricts the demonstration of the accidentality of unity, taken from Avicenna, to the unity principle of number, or indivisibility, without questioning the substantiality of the other kind of unity. In this way, Albert reconciles Avicenna's doctrine of unity with Averroës' one.

The distinction established in Text 11 recurs elsewhere in Albert's commentary. Albert develops the same point in greater detail, for example, in the digression IV, 1, 5. Albert probably refers, among others, to this text when, in Text 11, he uses the expression 'sicut iam dudum diximus':

<sup>24</sup> Later on Albert identifies *unitas* (in the sense of unity principle of number) and *indivisibilitas* as synonyms; cfr. infra, Text 13: "... tamen manet hoc accidens quod est indivisibilitas sive unitas ..."

Text 12 (I. IV, tr. 1, c. 5: p. 167, 52-59): Et hoc modo duplex est unitas. Quarum una est terminus substantiae vel entis, et unum huiusmodi est entis terminativum, et hoc est causa unitatum, non de genere unitatum existens. Alia est unitas, quae est indivisibile sive indivisibilitas causata et abstracta ab hoc uno, et hoc est accidens, cuius collectio facit numerum, et hoc unum non est convertibile cum ente, sed primum.

In Text 12 Albert describes the first kind of 'one' or unity as *terminus substantiae vel entis* and *entis terminativum* (cfr. the description of unity as *ipsa forma rei terminans* in Text 11), and as *convertibile cum ente* (cfr. *unum cum ente convertatur* in Text 11); he further adds that this unity is *causa unitatum, non de genere unitatum existens*. As to the second kind of unity, it is called in Text 12, as in Text 11, *indivisibile sive indivisibilitas*; Albert adds that it is caused and abstracted from the first kind of 'one', and that it is not convertible with being.

In a second section that Albert adds to the quotation of the second part of Avicenna's chapter III, 3, Albert gives us some more informations about the particular *status* of the unity principle of number. This section of Albert's digression is a sort of conclusion of Albert's quotation of Avicenna's second demonstration of the accidentality of unity (§ 2.1.2). Avicenna's demonstration is based on the impossibility for unity of existing in separation from substances. Albert explains why the unity principle of number, albeit being an accident, is, at the same time, inseparable from substances:

Text 13 (I. V, tr. 1, c. 8: p. 228, 91-98): Licet enim secundum quod principium numeri est, non sit pars, quae sit genus vel differentia, tamen manet hoc accidens quod est indivisibilitas sive unitas, de differentiae proprio actu, qui est terminare et finire esse ad terminum potentiae et actus. Et quia iste actus differentiae rem non relinquit, ideo unitas, qua quaelibet res dicitur una, rem ipsam numquam relinquit.

In Text 13 we can appreciate Albert's originality. In this text Albert, at the same time, provides an explanation of Avicenna's doctrine, which Avicenna himself does not give, and escapes the rigidity of Averroës's distinction between the two types of unity. Albert explains the inseparability of unity from substances, which Avicenna simply presupposes and demonstrates by means of a *reductio ad absurdum*, by linking the second kind of unity with a component of the essence of things, namely the specific difference. Albert says that this unity derives from the proper act of the specific difference, which is to delimit and put boundaries to the being of things. But in this way Albert somehow overcomes Averroës' distinction between the two kinds of unity, and places also the second kind of unity, not only the first one, in connection with essence. Whereas Averroës sharply distinguishes between the essential unity, on the one hand, and the accidental unity, on the other, Albert in this text regards the accidental unity as a *sui generis* accident, given its dependence on the specific difference.

In sum, Albert in the digression I, V, tr. 1, c. 8 reproduces the doctrine of Avicenna's chapter III, 3 in the perspective of Averroës' criticism of it. Albert quotes implicitly the text of this chapter, placing however Avicenna's doctrine in a new context. This new context is given by Averroës' distinction between the accidental numerical unity and the non-accidental transcendental unity. Averroës reproaches Avicenna for not having respected such a distinction. We can therefore rightly regard Albert's digression as a case of 'hidden' or 'implicit criticism' of Avicenna. For Albert changes Avicenna's text in order to make it safe from Averroës' attacks. From this point of view, digression V, 1, 8 is the specular image of another digression (IV, 1, 5), where, as I have shown elsewhere, Albert implicitly modifies Averroës's criticism against Avicenna's doctrine of unity and being, in order to make this criticism inoffensive<sup>25</sup>. This implicit reworking of Avicenna's and Averroës' texts in cases of disagreement between these two authors reveals the deep intelligence Albert had of the Arabic interpretations of Aristotle, and his peculiar project of an unitarian use of the Arabic Aristotelianism.

---

<sup>25</sup> BERTOLACCI, Amos: Albert the Great, *Metaphysica* IV, 1, 5: From the *Refutatio* to the *Excusatio* of Avicenna's Theory of Unity. In: AERTSEN, Jan A. / SPEER, Andreas (eds.): *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter*. Berlin [u.a.] 1998, pp. 881-887. Cf. LIBERA, Alain de: D'Avicenne à Averroës et retour. Sur les sources arabes de la théorie scolastique de l'un transcendental. In: *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4 (1994), pp. 141-179, especially pp. 152-156.