

**Before Essence and Existence:  
al-Kindi's Conception of Being**

**Peter Adamson**

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Terminology .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Simple Being .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. An Objection: Unlimited Being .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Complex Being.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Reconciling the Two Conceptions.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6. Does Al-kindī Anticipate the Distinction Between Essence and Existence?.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Endnotes .....</b>	<b>18</b>

## Introduction

In the person of al-Kindi (died ca. 870 A.D.), the Arabic tradition had its first self-consciously "philosophical" thinker. Those familiar with al-Kindi may know him chiefly because of his role in the transmission of Greek philosophy, though it is his transformation of the ideas he inherited that will interest us most here. While it is not clear whether al-Kindi himself could read Greek,<sup>1</sup> it is well documented that he guided the efforts of several important early translators. These included Ustath, translator of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*; Yahya b. al-Bitriq, who paraphrased several Platonic dialogues as well as translated Aristotle's *De Caelo*; and Ibn Na'ima al-Himsi. Al-Himsi translated logical works of Aristotle and parts of the *Enneads* of Plotinus, the latter in a paraphrase that has come down to us as a group of three texts dominated by the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*.<sup>2</sup> (I will refer below to these three texts collectively as the Arabic Plotinus.) Al-Kindi's circle of translators also produced a similar paraphrase of Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, which went first by the name *Book on the Pure Good* in its Arabic version and later, in its Latin version, by the title *Liber de Causis*. Translations in the Baghdad circle were made from both Greek and Syriac, and were supported by the 'Abbasid caliphs al-Ma'mun [End Page 297] (reigned 813-33) and al-Mu'tasim (reigned 833-42).<sup>3</sup> In his own works, many of which are letters addressed to al-Mu'tasim's son Ahmad, al-Kindi repeated and developed ideas and terminology from the philosophical works he read in translation, often in answer to questions posed by the recipient.

It would appear that al-Kindi considered the study of metaphysics to be primary in his endeavor to reconstruct Greek thought. His most significant remaining work, *On First Philosophy*, assimilates metaphysics or "first philosophy" to theology, the study of "the First Truth Who is the Cause of every truth."<sup>4</sup> His survey of the works of Aristotle likewise confirms that the *Metaphysics* studies God, His names and His status as the First Cause.<sup>5</sup> A similar conception underlies the Prologue to the *Theology of Aristotle*, which claims to "complete the whole of [Aristotelian] philosophy," and promises a "discussion of the First Divinity . . . and that it is the Cause of causes."<sup>6</sup> The Prologue also seems to portray this project as continuous with that of the *Metaphysics*. We might suspect, then, that al-Kindi took Aristotle's aim in the *Metaphysics* of studying "being *qua* being" as central to his own undertaking, and indeed as central to an adequate philosophical understanding of God.

In this paper I shall try to confirm this suspicion through a study of al-Kindi's corpus, focusing specifically on his conception of being, or, rather, on his *conceptions* of being; for as we shall see there are two competing treatments of being in al-Kindi. First, in common with the Arabic Plotinus and the *Liber de Causis*, he has a conception that emphasizes the simplicity of being, and opposes being to predication. Second, he has a complex conception of being indebted to Aristotle. These [End Page 298] two conceptions can be reconciled: simple being, I will argue, is prior to and underlies complex being. Finally, I will suggest that al-Kindi's simple conception of being anticipates Avicenna's distinction between existence and essence, but only to a limited extent.

## 1. Terminology

Before embarking on this examination of being it may be helpful to provide a brief discussion of the terminology used for "being" by al-Kindi and his translators. I will be examining passages from three main sources: first, the aforementioned *Book on the Pure Good* or *Liber de Causis*; <sup>7</sup> second, the Arabic paraphrase of Plotinus produced in al-Kindi's circle; <sup>8</sup> and third, al-Kindi's best-known work, entitled *On First Philosophy* (hereafter FP). Part of the purpose of such texts was to establish technical terms for use in philosophy. Toward this end neologisms were invented, often for use in rendering Greek technical terms in Arabic. This is the case with three terms we find used to mean "being": *anniyya*, *huwiyya*, and *ays*.

Of these three, the one that has received the most attention is *anniyya*. Even in medieval times Arabic scholars speculated on the derivation of the word, offering sometimes fanciful etymologies. <sup>9</sup> Though my argument does not turn on any particular etymology, the most likely derivation seems to be that suggested by Gerhard Endress: it is a substantification of the Arabic *anna*, which means "that" (as in "it is true *that* al-Kindi is a philosopher"). <sup>10</sup> It makes its first appearance in Arabic literature at the time of al-Kindi's circle, and is prominent in the Arabic Plotinus and the *Liber de Causis*. The same goes for the word *huwiyya*, which later acquires a different, technical meaning in al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, but in our texts is treated as a synonym for *anniyya*. (The exception is a passage in the Arabic Plotinus where *huwiyya* is used to translate Plotinus's *tautotes*, "identity." <sup>11</sup> This led the scholar Geoffrey Lewis mistakenly to render *huwiyya* as "identity" throughout his groundbreaking translation of the Arabic Plotinus. <sup>12</sup>) In the plural both *huwiyyat* and *anniyyat* are used as synonyms of the Greek *onta*, "beings." <sup>13</sup> These terminological [End Page 299] features are carried over into al-Kindi's own works, so that *huwiyya* and *anniyya* seem to be accepted technical terms for the Greek *einai* and *on* in all the texts we will be considering. <sup>14</sup>

The term *ays* is more unusual, and to my knowledge appears at this time only in al-Kindi's own writings and in the translations produced within his circle. <sup>15</sup> Al-Kindi seems to have coined the word by imaginatively splitting the Arabic *laysa*, "is not," into *la* ("not") and *ays* ("being"). He also uses *lays* as a noun meaning "not-being." Like *anniyya* and *huwiyya*, the neologism *ays* can refer to a particular existent, with *lays* meaning a non-being (this usage appears repeatedly in a long passage to be examined below, FP 123.3-124.16 [RJ 41.3-43.7]). But like *anniyya* and *huwiyya*, *ays* can also signify being abstractly considered; as we will see below, for al-Kindi a thing can go from *lays*, non-being, to *ays*, being. <sup>16</sup>

## 2. Simple Being

With these terminological considerations in mind, we may now turn to a philosophical analysis of the texts. Let us begin with the *Liber de Causis*:

(A) *Liber de Causis*, Proposition 1: And we give as an example of this being (*anniyya*), living, and man, because it must be that the thing is first being, then living, then man. Living is the proximate cause of the man, and being is its remote cause. Thus being is more a cause for the man than living, because it [sc. being] is the cause of living, which is the cause of the man. Likewise, when you posit rationality as cause of the man, being is more a cause for the man than rationality, because it is the cause of its cause. The proof of this is that, when you remove the rational power from the man, he does not remain man, but he remains living, ensouled, [and] sensitive. And when you remove living from him, he does not remain living, but he remains a being (*anniyya*), because being was not removed from him, but rather living, for the cause is not removed through the removal of its effect. Thus, the man remains a being. So when the individual is not a man, it is a living thing, and [when] not a living thing, it is only a being (*anniyya faqat*).<sup>17</sup>

The passage suggests a thought experiment, in which we strip away the features or attributes from man. Of particular interest to us is that when all the attributes have been removed, what remains is *anniyya faqat*, "only a being" or "being alone."

Compare this with the following passage, from the Arabic Plotinus:

(B) *Sayings of the Greek Sage* I.10-11: The intellect became all things because its Originator is not like anything. The First Originator does not resemble anything, because all things are from Him, and because He has no shape and no proper form attached to Him. For the [End Page 300] First Originator is one by Himself, I mean that He is only being (*anniyya faqat*), having no attribute (*sifa*) suitable to Him, because all the attributes are scattered forth from Him.

Just as in passage (A), the phrase *anniyya faqat* is used here to refer to the pure being that remains when all determinate features, or "attributes" (*sifat*), are removed. This is what I mean by saying that for both authors, being alone is "simple": it is free of attributes or predicates. The difference is that in the Arabic Plotinus, pure being is not the outcome of a thought experiment, but is God Himself, the First Originator who is equated with Plotinus's One and hence is also said to be the cause of Intellect. That the author of the Plotinian paraphrase should call God "being alone" has occasioned comment elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> The historical and philosophical importance of the claim is heightened by the fact that it is contrary to Plotinus's statements that the One is, in the words of Plato's *Republic*, *epekeina tês ousias*, "beyond being."<sup>19</sup>

Now, it is tempting to take the claim that God is being alone or "being itself" as tantamount to the claim that God is pure actuality, as Aristotle holds in the *Metaphysics*. Such later medieval writers as Ibn Sina and Thomas Aquinas explicitly take this over from Aristotle. Nor is such an understanding of God as actuality foreign to the Arabic Plotinus, since we find there a remarkable passage where the author writes that God "is the

thing existing truly in act. Nay rather, He is pure act" (*huwa al-shay' al-ka'in bi-l-fi'l haqqan, bal huwa al-fi'l al-mahd*).<sup>20</sup> While this passage does most likely represent an Aristotelian influence on the Plotinus paraphrase, it is an isolated example of that influence. (The thought that God is actuality may also account for al-Kindi's frequent descriptions of God as an "Agent" or the "First Agent."<sup>21</sup>) It is much more frequent to find the paraphrase calling God "being alone" because of His lack of attributes.<sup>22</sup> Thus when the author says in passage (B) and elsewhere that God is *anniyya faqat*, he seems above all to have in mind God's absolute simplicity, and His resulting lack of attributes. It is likely that this concern with simplicity and the exclusion of attributes is related to contemporaneous debates over divine attributes (*sifat*), which already raged in the ninth century, when the Arabic Plotinus was composed.<sup>23</sup>

It is significant for our understanding of passage (A) that we find the same conception of God in the *Liber de Causis*. In Proposition 4, the author of that paraphrase writes that God is "the pure being, the One, the True, in whom there is no multiplicity in any way" (*al-anniyya mahda, al-wahid, al-haqq, alladhilaysa fihi [End Page 301] kathra min al-jihat al-ashkhas*). As in the Arabic Plotinus, God is nothing but being, because He is simple. Being is contrasted to attributes, because the being of a thing is distinct from the multiple features that are predicated of that thing. Of course it is essential to created things like humans that they have their predicated features, because something cannot be a human without being alive, rational, and so on. But being is not just another of these predicates, essential or accidental. Rather, it is prior to the predicates.

What sort of priority is this? An answer is suggested by a remark of al-Kindi's:

(C) FP 113.11-13 [RJ 27.17-19]: Corruption is only the changing of the predicate, not of the first bearer of predication. As for the first bearer of predication, which is being (*ays*), it does not change, because for something corrupted, its corruption has nothing to do with the "making be" (*ta'yis*) of its being (*aysiyyatihi*).

This passage is not particularly clear, but it does explicitly make the point that *ays*, "being," is the "first bearer of predication" (*al-hamil al-awwal*). The meaning of this assertion becomes clearer against the background of texts (A) and (B). Being is prior to the predicates of a thing, for example "living" and "rational" in the case of a human, because it is the *subject of predication*.

If this is right, then "being" is treated as analogous to Aristotelian matter. The analogy is suggested by both passages (A) and (C).<sup>24</sup> Passage (A) is reminiscent of Aristotle's discussion in the *Metaphysics* where, on one traditional interpretation, he describes matter as the ultimate subject of predication that underlies all the features of a thing.<sup>25</sup> Also like Aristotelian matter, being subsists through change, as becomes clear in passage (C) when al-Kindi says that being "does not change." The point is an intelligible one: even in the case of substantial corruption (such as death in the case of a human), there is not an absolute destruction of being but merely of the way the thing is. This is why the corpse that remains when the human is no

longer alive is yet something that *exists*. Finally, like Aristotelian matter, mere being must be simple, where "simple" again means without predicates. For, as the ultimate subject of predication, being itself cannot be further analyzed into a complex of subject and predicates. The analogy does break down insofar as matter is associated with potentiality, whereas being (according to the Arabic Plotinus, as we saw above) is more aptly associated with actuality.

As in the Neoplatonic translations, for al-Kindi this analysis of being in the case of complex, created things is linked to a conception of God. Al-Kindi follows the authors of the two paraphrases in saying that God is being. For example, he [End Page 302] says that God is "the true Being" (*al-anniyya al-haqq*),<sup>26</sup> and asserts that God creates "through His being" (*bi-huwiyyatihi*).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, he follows them in emphasizing that God is being because He is simple, or one:

(D) FP 161.10-14 [RJ 95.24-96.3]: The cause of unity in unified things is the True, First One, and everything that receives unity is caused. For every one that is not truly the One is one metaphorically, not in truth. And every one of the effects of unity goes from [God's] unity to what is other than [God's] being (*huwiyya*), I mean that [God] is not multiple with respect to existing (*min hayth yujadu*). [The effect] is multiple, not absolutely one, and by "absolutely one" I mean not multiple at all, so that His unity is nothing other than His being (*wa-laysa wahdatuhu shay'an ghayr huwiyyatihi*).

It is clear from the end of this passage that for al-Kindi, unity is convertible with being in the case of God,<sup>28</sup> and that unity is here to be understood as excluding multiplicity. Indeed text (D) is the culmination of al-Kindi's efforts in the final surviving chapter of FP to argue that God has no attributes. This fits well with text (C) and the opposition it makes between being and attributes. So it would seem that the notion of God in FP is the same as the one we discerned in the Neoplatonic paraphrases: God is being, which is to say that He has no multiplicity of attributes distinct from His being.<sup>29</sup>

We now need to make sense of the notion that this simple being is the subject of predication in complex things. We can do this by bearing in mind that complex things are created things. Hence the contrast in passage (D) is between God, a simple and ineffable First Cause who is identical with His own being, and the complex things that are *not* identical with their own being. Yet the being of those created things is in itself simple, as we see in passages (A) and (C), for it is distinct from or prior to the predicates. Furthermore, the simple being of a created thing is the direct effect of God. Indeed this is what creation amounts to: the bestowal of the simple being upon which the created thing's complexity is founded. Thus the *Liber de Causis* asserts that "the first of originated things is being" and that created being then "receives multiplicity."<sup>30</sup> The Neoplatonic lineaments of the [End Page 303] theory are clear enough: createdness amounts to receiving simple being from a simple One that is the principle of being, or pure being.<sup>31</sup>

It is in this sense that God's creating something is God's making that thing exist. Thus al-Kindi uses the same terminology of "being alone" in the following context:

FP 101.5-7: There are four scientific inquiries: [. . .] "whether" (*hal*), "what," "which" and "why" [. . .] and "whether" is an investigation of being alone (*'an anniyya faqat*).

Here al-Kindi is drawing on Aristotle, who differentiates questions regarding "whether" (*to hoti*) from those regarding what a thing is (*to ti estin*) in *Posterior Analytics* II.1. Al-Kindi's explicit discussions of creation bear out the equivalence of being created and receiving being. In general, the generation of any given thing is a "coming-to-be of being (*ays*) from non-being (*'an lays*)" (FP 118.18 [RJ 33.25]). And in particular, "origination" (*al-ibda'*) or creation is "the manifestation (*izhar*) of the thing from non-being (*'an lays*)."<sup>32</sup> Such passages are further evidence that al-Kindi could use terms meaning "being" to refer to the sheer existence of something, the fact that it is: *to hoti*, in Aristotle's terminology. This act of existing will be distinct from the predicates true of the created thing; indeed, it will be ontologically prior to those predicates as their subject.



### 3. An Objection: Unlimited Being

It might be objected that I am ascribing a remarkably impoverished view of God and being to al-Kindi. Why think, this objector might say, that simple being has to exclude attributes, instead of containing them all implicitly? We might suppose that, on the contrary, God is the fullness of Being, containing all things as a unity within Himself, so that in a sense He has all attributes rather than none. His proper effect would still be created being, which like God would virtually contain all predicates until it became *specified* as a certain sort of thing. Perhaps, then, we should talk of God as "unlimited" being rather than "simple" being: as the Principle and Cause of all things, God would in fact have all the attributes as a simultaneous unity, much in the manner of Plotinian *nous*.

Our imaginary objector would find support in the Neoplatonic paraphrases cited above. The Arabic Plotinus entertains the notion that God must possess the same attributes as His effects, but in a more eminent way, rather than excluding all attributes.<sup>33</sup> In a discussion of God as cause of the virtues, the author also suggests that God's being is *identical* with the divine attributes: [End Page 304]

ThA IX.71 [B 130.9-10]: The virtues are in the First Cause in the manner of a cause. Not that it is in the position of a receptacle for the virtues; rather its entirety is a being (*anniyya*) that is all the virtues.

Here the emphasis on God's not being a "receptacle" (*wi'a*) for the virtues is intended to stress that there is no distinction between God and the virtues. Even prior to al-Kindi's translation circle, a similar position was taken by the Kalam thinker Abu 'l-Hudhayl, who is said to have claimed that "[God] is knowing in an act of knowing that is He and is powerful in a power of efficient causality that is He and is living in a life that is He."<sup>34</sup>

We can illustrate the difference between "simple" and "unlimited" being by distinguishing two ways in which a subject can relate to its predicate. Take, for example, the statements "al-Kindi is rational" and "al-Kindi is the first Arabic philosopher." In the former, the subject and predicate are distinct, so that al-Kindi is not the same thing as his rationality, whereas in the latter the subject is being identified with the predicate.<sup>35</sup> If we apply this to the case of God we have the difference between simple and unlimited being. A believer in simple being holds that a subject must be distinct from its predicate, as al-Kindi is distinct from his rationality. The insight behind the notion of being as unlimited is that if the subject is *identical* with the predicate, then predication need not imply multiplicity. In the divine case, we may say that "God is just" and "God is wise," but He is not three things (justice, wisdom, and the subject of justice and wisdom). Rather, God, His justice, and His wisdom are all identical. God will still be simple, if "simple" means not multiple, but He will not be simple in the stricter sense of lacking all attributes. [End Page 305]

However, there are good reasons for supposing that al-Kindi, as well as the authors of the Neoplatonic translations we have considered, usually supposed that a subject must be distinct from its predicate, so that being must lack all predicates if it is to be simple. This comes out most obviously in the final surviving section of FP, where al-Kindi argues at length that

nothing can be predicated of God. After systematically showing that every kind of predicate is incompatible with the divine unity, he concludes: "therefore [God] is only and purely unity (*wahda faqat mahd*), I mean nothing other than unity" (FP 160.16-17 [RJ 95.13-14]). Similarly, the most explicit statement on divine predication in the Arabic Neoplatonic texts is the thoroughly negative one in *Liber de Causis*, Proposition 5. Further consideration of passage (C) above yields the same result. Here al-Kindi not only says that being is the subject of predication, but also that the predicate can change while the subject remains. This makes clear that being, the subject, is not identical to the predicate. Rather, we saw that as "the first bearer of predication" being in itself lacks predicates, after the fashion of Aristotelian matter. Likewise, passage (A) from the *Liber de Causis* envisions "only being" as the result of *removing* predicates, not as a richer principle that implicitly contains or is identical to all predicates. Thus the passages considered so far presuppose that subject and predicate are distinct, and draw the conclusion that being (in the case of both God and created things) is simple in the sense of lacking attributes. Yet we will now see that al-Kindi does have a notion of being that includes complexity and attributes. This "complex" being is appropriate only to created things, and presupposes "simple" being.

## 4. Complex Being

Others, such as Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny,<sup>36</sup> have noted a double meaning of *anniyya* in the texts produced by al-Kindi's circle. On the one hand, as we have seen, *anniyya* can refer to mere existence. On the other hand, it can include the actual nature or essence of a thing: not *that* it is, but *what* it is. In the case of a human, for example, being in this complex sense would mean "being a human." This equivocation on the meaning of *anniyya* is already prominent in Ustath's translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which uses *anniyya* to translate both *einai* ("to be" or "being" in the broadest sense) and *to ti en einai* ("essence").<sup>37</sup>

The complex conception of being is illustrated in passages like the following:

FP 117.3-5 [RJ 31.22-24]: If time is limited, then the being (*anniyya*) of the body [of the universe] is limited, since time is not an existent (*bi-mawjud*), and there is no body without time, since time is the number of motion.

FP 120.3-4 [RJ 35.21-22]: Body is not prior to time, so it is not possible that the body of the universe have no limit, because of its being (*li-anniyyatihi*). So the being (*anniyya*) of the body of the universe is necessarily limited.

Such passages actually play on the double meaning of *anniyya*. The simple conception is employed here insofar as al-Kindi is indeed talking about the sheer [End Page 306] existence of the world, and whether that existence is eternal. But the complex conception is also evident, because he says in the second passage that the *anniyya* of the body of the universe causes it to have a limited, temporal existence.<sup>38</sup> Here it would be more natural to understand *anniyya* as "nature" or "essence." Indeed, at one point he makes a remark that equates *huwiyya*, "being," with *ma huwa*, "what a thing is" (FP 119.15-16 [RJ 35.14-15]).

The complex conception seems to underlie another frequent usage of the words *anniyya* and *ays*, where they mean "a being." Thus *anniyyat* and *aysat* can mean "beings," *onta*, as mentioned briefly above in our terminological survey. A typical instance in al-Kindi can be found in his treatise *On the First True Agent*, where he writes that God's creative act is a "bringing-to-be (*ta'yis*) of beings (*aysat*) from non-being (*lays*)" (FP 182.7 [RJ 169.6]). Here *lays* seems to be the opposite of *ays* in the simple sense, so that "non-being" means simple non-existence. Likewise the verbal noun *ta'yis* seems to be based on simple being, much in the spirit of the definitions of creation cited above at the end of section 2. But the plural *aysat* seems more likely to mean "beings" in the sense of fully constituted entities.<sup>39</sup> These will be beings of a particular sort, complete with the predicated features that are excluded from simple being.

The same is true for a more extended meditation on being and essence at the beginning of the third section of FP, where al-Kindi gives a lengthy argument designed to show that a thing cannot be the cause of its own essence. In typical Kindian style, he proceeds with an exhaustive consideration of four possibilities. First, that neither the thing nor its essence (*dhat*) are "a being" (*ays*), that is, that they do not exist. Second, that the

thing is non-existent and its essence is existent; third, that the thing exists but its essence is non-existent; and fourth and finally, that both the thing and its essence exist. He shows that, on any of these assumptions, the thing could not cause its own essence. The key to the argument is the repeated insistence that the thing and its essence are not distinct. For example, on the second assumption, the thing's

essence would be distinct from it, because distinct things are those for which it is possible that something happen to one without happening to the other. Therefore, if it happens to it that it be a non-being, and it happens to its essence that it be a being, then its essence will not be it. But the essence of every thing is itself [*wa-kull shay' fa-dhatuhu hiya huwa*]. (FP 123.18-124.3 [RJ 41.16-18])

At first glance this argument seems to be using exclusively the simple conception of being, since it considers merely whether a thing or its essence exists. But [End Page 307] the overall thrust of the argument is that the being of a thing is the same as the being of its essence. This seems explicitly to reject the simple conception of being. For the whole point of the simple conception is that we can think about the being of a thing in abstraction from thinking about the thing's attributes, some of which will constitute its essence. Instead, al-Kindi insists here that we cannot consider a thing to exist, to be "a being," without simultaneously considering it to be identical with its essence. His argument turns on the double meaning of *dhat*, which can signify "self" as well as "essence," so that *al-shay' ghayr dhatihi* means both "the thing is distinct from its essence" and "the thing is distinct from itself."<sup>40</sup> And the latter, of course, would be absurd. By insisting on this point, al-Kindi is insisting on the complex notion of being, on which we cannot distinguish being from having a certain essence.

## 5. Reconciling the Two Conceptions

We have, then, found traces of two conflicting notions of being in al-Kindi's writings. When he speaks of "being alone," he means the mere act of existing that is prior to, and the subject of, the existent's essence and other predicates. But he also speaks of "a being," by which he means a fully constituted being that is already considered to have an essence. On this latter notion, the being of each thing will be distinct from the being of anything else; on the former notion, being is mere existence and belongs to anything that God has seen fit to create. I think we can, however, discern a coherent philosophical position that would bring the two conceptions together.

Consider first what al-Kindi has to say about the Aristotelian notion of substance. In his treatise on definitions, al-Kindi defines substance as follows:

*On the Definitions and Descriptions of Things* 166.7: "Substance" (*jawhar*) is what subsists through itself (*bi-nafsihi*). It is the bearer (*hamil*) for accidents, and its essence (*dhat*) does not undergo alteration.

Notice how similar the role of substance here is to that of "being" (*ays*) in text (C), which first introduced us to the simple notion of being in al-Kindi. We have the same terminology, *hamil*, this time used to express the fact that substance underlies accidents in the way that *ays* was in passage (C) said to underlie any predicate (*mahmul*). Notice also the emphasis on the fact that it can be the bearer of predication because it remains unchanged in itself, just as the "being" of passage (C) was said to subsist through a corruption.

But note too the difference between "substance" in this definition and *ays* in passage (C). For one thing, al-Kindi says not that substance underlies all predication, but only accidental predication. In another treatise, al-Kindi makes the same [End Page 308] point more emphatically in a very similar definition: "[one must] know the adjuncts of the substance that distinguish it from everything else, namely that it is subsisting through its essence (*bi-dhatihi*). . . , [that it is] the bearer (*al-hamil*) for diversity, and is . . . unchanging."<sup>41</sup> Here the phrase "subsisting through its essence" shows that the being of a substance is complex being, where "to be" is to have an essence of a certain kind. Another difference is that, though both of these definitions make the point that substance cannot change, we know that a substance can in fact corrupt (e.g., when a man dies). So substance will not be unchanging in the strongest sense; rather, the point must be that substance remains unchanged in itself through *accidental* change. The being of passage (C), on the other hand, remains unaltered even through "corruption" (*fasad*), which I take to refer even (perhaps especially) to substantial corruption.<sup>42</sup>

With these contrasts in mind, we can see that the superficial similarity between substance and (simple) being is due to the fact that the two are analogous. The being appropriate to substance is complex; it involves reference to what is essential to the substance. Thus, as we have just seen, substance is even said to "subsist through its essence." This complex, essential, or substantial being is then the subject of accidental predication. Being in the sense employed in passage (C), on the other hand, is simple; it is the subject of all predication, and thus can be called the "first bearer of

predication." Al-Kindi obscures the difference between the two by referring to both simple being and substance as *anniyya* or *ays*. But the equivocation does not lead to any incoherency in al-Kindi's thought, for the two conceptions operate at different levels. Simple being, or "being alone," underlies all, and perhaps especially essential,<sup>43</sup> predicates. Complex being, or substance, results when an essence is predicated of simple being, and it underlies accidents.

The complex notion of being accurately, if roughly, represents the sort of being expounded in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aristotle stresses that to be is to be a certain sort or kind of thing, and says that of the many ways "being" is said, the primary sense is that associated with a substance of a specific kind.<sup>44</sup> As we saw, the **[End Page 309]** simple notion of being also derives partly from Aristotle, whose *Posterior Analytics* distinguishes between what a thing is and that it is. But the fact that al-Kindi's treatment of simple being is ontological, as well as epistemic, seems more at home in a Neoplatonic framework. For example, as suggested above, the account is Neoplatonic insofar as it portrays createdness as a sort of participation in being, and insofar as it recognizes a principle that is absolute Being.

## 6. Does Al-Kindi Anticipate the Distinction Between Essence and Existence?

We can now address a final question, namely whether al-Kindi precedes Ibn Sina in formulating the distinction between essence and existence.<sup>45</sup> If we focus on al-Kindi's complex conception of being, the answer is no. On this conception, if we ask al-Kindi what the being of a given thing is, he will reply in terms of its essence or substance. Here what it is "to be" for any created thing—a thing of kind X—must involve reference to what is required in order to be an X. So for example, "being a human" requires rationality, animality, and any other features essential to humans. The complex conception of being is, then, alien to the distinction between essence and existence, since complex being already includes essence.

So let us restrict ourselves to the simple conception of being. Here I think we do find significant overlap between the views of al-Kindi and Ibn Sina, on the following points:

(1) The most fundamental agreement is that being or existence is distinct from attributes, even essential attributes. For Ibn Sina, this is shown by the fact that we can think about the existence of a thing independently of its nature. He uses the example of a triangle to illustrate this: we can talk about the essential properties of a triangle without even knowing whether there are in fact any triangles.<sup>46</sup>

(2) In the case of God, for both al-Kindi and Ibn Sina, this distinction between *whether* something is and *what* it is disappears. God is nothing but being, because He does not have any features distinct from His being. Ibn Sina says, for instance, that God "is sheer existence (*mujarrad al-mawjud*)—with the condition of negating anything understood as [adding] properties to it."<sup>47</sup>

(3) A created thing, on the other hand, has a nature distinct from its being, so it must receive existence from something else, namely God.<sup>48</sup> As we saw al-Kindi [End Page 310] argues explicitly in FP<sup>49</sup> that a thing cannot be the cause of its own being. The contrast between God's intrinsic existence and the extrinsically caused existence of created effects is also emphasized by al-Kindi:

FP 97.12-14 [RJ 9.12-13]: the cause of the existence (*wujud*) and fixity of every thing is the True, because everything that has being (*anniyya*) has truth. So the True is necessarily existent (*mawjud*); therefore the beings (*anniyyat*) are existent (*mawjudat*).

This is perhaps the most "Avicennan" statement to be found in FP, since it emphasizes the necessary existence of God and even uses the word *wujud* to pick out existence. The passage again equivocates on the word *anniyya*, between complex and simple being. The first sentence equates *anniyya* with *mawjud*, and uses both to refer to the sheer fact of something's existence. But the second sentence refers to "beings" (*anniyyat*), which will be beings in the fully constituted sense, as distinct from their (simple) existence, *wujud*. In general, Ibn Sina will likewise prefer *wujud* for existence in the latter sense, while often using *anniyya* with a sense closer to "essence."<sup>50</sup> (In one version of the famous "Flying Man" argument, where Ibn Sina

shows that sensation is not required for awareness of one's own existence, he says the flying man is aware of the *wujud* of his *anniyya*.<sup>51</sup> )

Despite these parallels between Kindian "simple" being and Avicennan existence, we should be cautious of ascribing to al-Kindi a full-fledged distinction between existence and essence. One might suppose that there is a difference between the positions of al-Kindi and Ibn Sina, insofar as Ibn Sina usually talks of existence as "coming to" an essence, which suggests that essence is ontologically prior to existence, not (as in al-Kindi) the other way around. This conclusion is encouraged by Ibn Sina's references to existence as "accidental" to a thing. In fact, however, I think that this particular contrast between the two is spurious. Ibn Sina does not in fact think that existence is "posterior" to the essence of the existent thing:

It is not possible that the attribute called "existence" be caused in a thing by its essence, which is quite distinct from its existence or any other attribute. For the cause precedes the effect ontologically, but nothing is prior to existence (*la mutaqaddim bi-'l-mawjud qablu 'l-wujud*).<sup>52</sup>

Avicennan existence should not be thought of as an additional element or property of a particular thing, which is predicated of the thing's essence. As Fazlur Rahman has argued, it may be more fruitful to think of existence as "instantiation," which is prior even to the essence's being universal or particular.<sup>53</sup> [End Page 311]

Rather, the contrast between the two is that Ibn Sina, unlike al-Kindi, never talks of being as the *subject* of essence or any other predicate. It is here that the analogy between al-Kindi's "simple" being and Avicennan existence breaks down. I would suggest that al-Kindi did want to oppose being to attributes or essence, and even did so for the reason that motivates the distinction in Ibn Sina: to show that created things must receive their existence from without, and (by denying the distinction in God's case) to articulate divine simplicity. But his simple conception of being goes directly from this contrast to the conclusion that being is the subject of the predication, which suggests that the only contrast to "predicate" conceptually available to him was that of "subject." (His insistence that being is indeed contrasted with predicates, rather than identical with predicates, has been explained in section 3 above.) But this is to say that al-Kindi in fact *lacked* the existence/essence distinction, which is a distinction of a very different kind than that between subject and predicate.

This is a point of great significance for the theology presented in Kindi circle texts. The contrast between being and predicate means that, when these authors talk about God as the "First Being" or "only being," they are denying the possibility of divine predication. For this reason, it is difficult for al-Kindi or his translators to give a coherent philosophical account of the nature of God. If God is paradigmatically identified with simple being, in order to emphasize His simplicity, then it quickly becomes apparent that we will not be able to say anything about God at all.

Of course it would be anachronistic to criticize al-Kindi for not fully anticipating Ibn Sina, and we should be content to point out the historically significant fact that, as the above points of similarity (1)-(3) show, his simple conception of being does foreshadow certain aspects of Avicennan



existence. It is however not anachronistic to point out that these early, apophatic identifications of God with being fail on their own terms, insofar as a goal of al-Kindi's circle was to make the First Principle of Greek philosophy into the Creator described in revealed texts. This being their goal, it would perhaps have been more fruitful had they further pursued the tentative forays in the Arabic Plotinus toward an "unlimited" conception of being (i.e., as a simple being that is identical with divine attributes), or indeed the idea that God is pure actuality (also present in the Arabic Plotinus, as mentioned above in section 2). Indeed these hints toward a positive theology in the Arabic Neoplatonic translations may have played a role in the development of Ibn Sina's own metaphysics.<sup>54</sup> But it cannot be said that al-Kindi himself, at least in the works that remain available to us, explored these kataphatic ideas even as fully as did the translators of his own circle.<sup>55</sup>

## Endnotes

1. See the discussion of this question in A. Cortabarría Beitia, "À partir de quelles sources étudier al-Kindi?", *MIDEO* 10 (1970): 83-108.

2. In what follows I shall assume that Himsi was in fact the author of the paraphrase and the source of its deviations from Plotinus, contrary to the earlier supposition that the paraphrase was originally by Porphyry (see, e.g., P. Thillet, "Indices Porphyriens dans la Théologie d'Aristote," in *Le Néoplatonisme*, Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Sciences Humaines, Royaumont 9-13, Juin 1969 [Paris, 1971], 293-302, and S. Pinès, "Les Textes dits plotiniens et le courant 'porphyrien' dans le néoplatonisme grec," in *ibid.*, 303-17). For the case against Porphyry and for Himsi as the sole author, see F. Zimmermann, "The Origins of the So Called *Theology of Aristotle*," in J. Kraye et al., eds., *Warburg Institute Surveys and Texts XI: Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages* (London: Warburg Institute, 1986), 110-240, esp. 131-3. For an update of Zimmermann's views on al-Kindi's circle, generally consonant with his conclusions in this earlier paper, see "Proclus Arabus Rides Again," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 9-51. See further P. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the "Theology of Aristotle"* (London: Duckworth, 2002).

3. Because al-Kindi's works are so closely engaged with the translations he commissioned, it is important to consider those translations in any consideration of his philosophy. Often passages in the extant Arabic versions of Aristotle or the Neoplatonists provide a starting-point for understanding his philosophical works, and indeed this will be my strategy below. For a superb analysis of the translation movement under the 'Abbasids, see D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998); on al-Kindi's circle in particular 145-50. See also G. Endress, "The Circle of al-Kindi," in *The Ancient Tradition in Christian and Islamic Hellenism*, G. Endress and R. Kruk, eds. (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1997), 43-76.

4. *K. fi 'l-Falsafa al-Ula (On First Philosophy)*, 98.1-2. All translations from al-Kindi and other texts are my own unless otherwise noted. The Arabic texts for many philosophical works of al-Kindi can be found in al-Kindi, *Rasa'il al-Kindial-Falsafiyya*, M. Abu Rida, ed. (Cairo: 1950-53). Page and line citations are to Volume One of this work unless otherwise noted.

A most welcome development in al-Kindi studies is the series edited by Roshdi Rashed and Jean Jolivet, *Oeuvres Philosophiques & Scientifiques d'al-Kindi*, appearing with Brill in five volumes. As yet, only the first two have appeared (Volume One: *L'Optique et la Catoptrique* [Leiden: Brill, 1997], Volume Two: *Métaphysique et Cosmologie* [Leiden: Brill, 1998]). But as the Arabic texts provided in this series will undoubtedly be the standard edition in the future, I will give additional page and line citations to Volume Two of this series where applicable, marked in brackets and with the abbreviation RJ.

5. *R. fi kammiyya Kutub Aristutalis wa ma yuhtaju ilayhi fi tahsil al-falsafa (On the Quantity of the Books of Aristotle and What is Required for the Attainment of Philosophy)*, Abu Rida, 363-84 at 384.9.

6. The Arabic text for the *Theology* and other parts of the Arabic Plotinus is in *Aflutin 'inda 'l-'Arab*, A. Badawi, ed. (Cairo: 1955). Translations are my own, but for the reader's convenience section numbers are taken from G. Lewis's English translation in *Plotini Opera*, P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), vol. 2. I also give references to Badawi's edition by page and line numbers in brackets prefaced by "B." Thus, for example, the passage just quoted is Prologue 11 and 14 [B 6.1 and 6.7-8].

For an argument aimed at showing that al-Kindi was the author of the Prologue to the *Theology*, see C. D'Ancona Costa, "Al-Kindi on the Subject Matter of the First Philosophy. Direct and Indirect Sources of 'Falsafa-l-Ula,' Chapter

One," in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter*, J. A. Aertsen and A. Speer, eds., *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 841-55.

7. For the Arabic text, see O. Bardenhewer, *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift über das reine Gute* (Frankfurt a.M.: Minerva, 1882). The best English translation currently available can be found in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, Guagliardo et al., trans. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1996).

8. It is now well established that three separate texts represent an original, united Arabic Plotinus paraphrase: the *Uthulujiyya* (*Theology of Aristotle*); the *Sayings of the Greek Sage*, which assembles various texts attributed to "the Greek Sage" (*al-Shaykh al-Yunani*); and the pseudo-Farabian *R. fi 'l-Ilm al-Ilahi* (*Letter on Divine Science*). See Zimmermann (1986), 113.

9. M.-Th. D'Alverny, "Anniyya-Anitas," in *Mélanges offerts à Étienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1959), 65. See also R. M. Frank, "The Origin of the Arabic Philosophical Term *Anniyya*," *Cahiers de Byrsa* 6 (1956): 181-201, which argues for a Syriac derivation.

10. G. Endress, *Proclus Arabus: Zwanzig Abschnitte aus der Institutio Theologica in arabischer Übersetzung* (Beirut and Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1973), 80.

11. *Theology of Aristotle*, VIII.125.

12. The translation is referred to above in n. 6. That *huwiyya* and *anniyya* are in fact synonyms in this work can be verified by comparing, for example, *Letter on Divine Science* (100), where the paraphrase refers to God as *huwiyya faqat*, with our text (C) below, where God is called *anniyya faqat*. Similarly, we find intellect referred to as both *huwiyya* and *anniyya* (e.g., *Theology* X.3 and VIII.122-4, 135, respectively).

13. *Sayings of the Greek Sage* IX.3 and *Theology of Aristotle* VII.19. See below for further discussion of this usage.

14. For *anniyya* and *huwiyya* as "being" in the abstract sense, see, e.g., al-Kindi, FP 117.4 [RJ 31.22] and 113.2 [RJ 27.9], respectively. For *anniyyat*, "beings," see FP 97.14 [RJ 9.13]. Jolivet, incidentally, translates both terms with the French "existence."

For further comment on the term *anniyya*, see G. Endress and D. Gutas, *A Greek-Arabic Lexicon* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), Fasc. 4, 428-36.

15. For references to the range of usage in al-Kindi, see the comments on *ays* in Endress (1973), 104-5.

16. See further Endress (1973), 104-5. Again, Jolivet translates *aysiyya* as "existence," and usually renders *ays* as "un existant." In the short physical treatise *R. fi'l-Jirm al-Hamil bi-Tiba'ihī al-Lawn min al-'anasir al-Arba'a wa alladhihuwa 'Illa al-Lawn fi'Ghayrihi* (*On the Body that is by Nature the Bearer for the Color of the Four Elements, and which is the Cause of the Color in Things Other than Itself*), Abu Rida, vol. II, 64-8, al-Kindi equates *ays* with "the existent" (*al-mawjudā*), 66.3.

17. Cf. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Proposition 70.

18. See especially R. Taylor, "Aquinas, the *Plotiniana Arabica* and the Metaphysics of Being and Actuality," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998): 241-64.

19. See *Enneads* V.4.2, V.6.6; Plato, *Republic* 509b.

20. *Theology of Aristotle* III.47 [B 51.13].

21. See especially *Al-Fa'il al-Haqq al-Awwal al-Tamm wa 'l-Fa'il al-Naqis alladhi huwa bi-'l-Majaz* (*On the True, First Complete Agent and the Deficient Agent that is Metaphorically [an Agent]*) Abu Rida 182-4. In Arabic, as in English, the word for "act" or "actuality," *fi'l*, has the same root as the word "agent," *fa'il*.

22. *Theology of Aristotle* V.14, 40, X.2, 88, 175-81, *Letter on Divine Science* 107, *Sayings of the Greek Sage* I.27-28. The thrust of these passages is often that, since God is simple, He does not have a will or thought process external to His essence that He uses in creation. Thus, He creates "through being alone." See further below, n. 27.

23. The same conclusion is reached by C. D'Ancona Costa in her article "*Causa prima superior est omni narratione*. Il tema delle sifate Allah nel primo neoplatonismo arabo," forthcoming in *Oriente Moderno*. I defend the claim in Adamson (2002), 5.4.4.

24. This has also been suggested with regard to passage (C) in a brief remark by J. Jolivet, *L'Intellect selon Kindi* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 121. The close analogy between being and matter, both simple and immediate effects of a simple God, is underscored by the similar vocabulary applied literally to matter in the contemporaneous Arabic version of Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, Proposition 72: "The first bearer of predication (hamil), namely matter, bears all things and is an intellectual substrate. The First Agent makes it, and He is the Agent of all things." See Endress (1973), 25, lines 7-9 of the Arabic edition.

25. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1029a13-26. One part of the passage in particular could have inspired the view we find in (A) and (C): "by matter I mean what in itself is not a 'something' (*ti*) or a quality, nor anything else by which being (*to on*) is defined. For there is something of which each of these is predicated (*katêgoreitai*), for whom 'to be' (*to einai*) is other than it is for each of the predicates (*tôn katêgoriôn*)" (1029a20-24).

26. *K. fi 'l-Ibana 'an al-'Illa al-Fa'ila al-Qariba li-'l-Kawn wa-'l-Fasad* (*On the Explanation of the Proximate Cause of Generation and Corruption*), Abu Rida 214-37, at 215.4.

27. FP 162.3 [RJ 97.10]. The same claim is found frequently in the Arabic Plotinus. See, for example, *Theology of Aristotle* V.46 (*bi-huwiyyatihi*), X.88 (*bi-anniyya faqat*).

28. The same conclusion is drawn by J. Janssens, "al-Kindi's Concept of God," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 17 (1994): 7.

29. For a similar line of thought on al-Kindi's part in a very different context, compare a passage from his treatise against the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. (The treatise is preserved by Yahya Ibn 'Adi, who quotes it piece by piece in order to refute it. See A. Périer, "Un traité de Yahya ben 'Adi. Défense du dogme de la Trinité contre les objections d'al-Kindi," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien*, 3rd series, 22 [1920-21]: 3-21. The text is now also available at RJ 123-7.) Here al-Kindi writes that "everything composed is caused (*kull murakkab ma'lul*)" (Périer, 4 [RJ 123.16]). The point, again, is that God's primacy is incompatible with multiplicity in any form.

The same point appears in the cosmological treatise *R. fi Wahdaniyya Allah wa Tanahi Jirm al-'Alam* (*On the Oneness of God and the Finitude of the Body of the World*), Abu Rida 201-7: "Therefore [the Agent] is not multiple, but one, without multiplicity—may He be praised—and He is much higher than the attributes of the heretics" (207.14 [RJ 147.2-3]).

30. O. Bardenhewer (1882), 65.4, 65.10. Compare *Theology of Aristotle* X.9, which says that God creates the "being (*huwiyya*) of intellect." See also the analysis provided by C. D'Ancona Costa in "La doctrine de la création 'mediante intelligentia' dans le *Liber de Causis* et dans ses sources," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 76 (1992): 209-33, repr. in *Recherches sur le Liber de Causis*, Études de philosophie médiévale, vol. 72. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1995).

31. The main distinction between the view as I have presented it and what we find in Greek Neoplatonists like Plotinus and Proclus is that, for the Greek thinkers, the First Principle transcends being. Treating the Neoplatonists' One as the principle of being helps al-Kindi and his translators with their project of making the First Principle of the philosophers into the Creator of Christianity and Islam.

32. *FiHudud al-Ashya' wa Rusumiha (On the Definitions and Descriptions of Things)*, Abu Rida 165-79 at 165.11. For this treatise, which seems to be a storehouse of technical definitions culled largely from Greek sources, see F. Klein-Franke, "Al-Kindi's 'On Definitions and Descriptions of Things,'" *Le Muséon: Revue des Études Orientales* 95 (1982): 191-216.

33. In the Arabic Plotinus this thought is sometimes expressed by saying that God is "above (*fawqa*)" the attributes, but can be said to have them paradigmatically with this qualification. See for example the *Letter on Divine Science*, 117-9 [B 175.11-15]: "Even though we say that He is other than them, and other than substance, other than intellect, and other than all other things, we do not say that He is not a substance, nor do we say that He is lacking intellect, lacking sight, and lacking knowledge. But we say that He is above substance, and above intellect, above sight, and above knowledge . . . Therefore He is the knowledge that is above every knowledge, because He is the First Knowledge. . . ." This is one of many features of the Arabic Plotinus materials that have led C. D'Ancona Costa to argue that the author was influenced by the Pseudo-Dionysius. See the articles collected in D'Ancona Costa (1995), and more recently her article "Divine and Human Knowledge in the Plotiniana Arabica," in *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, J. L. Cleary, ed. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 419-42.

34. From a passage in Ash'ari's *Maqalat*, cited in Richard M. Frank, "The Divine Attributes According to the Teaching of Abu 'l-Hudhayl al-'Allaf," *Le Muséon* 82 (1969): 453. Other Mu'tazilites held similar positions and, like Abu 'l-Hudhayl, juxtaposed them with a largely apophatic theology. Thus it is reported that Najjar and Dirar held that God possesses the attributes "by Himself" (*li-nafsihi*), while Ibn Kullab is ascribed the statement that "the attributes of God are essential to Him (*li-dhatihi*)." See H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 208 and 223.

35. This is often called the difference between the "is of predication" and the "is of identity." I am not focusing on the role of the verb "is" here, as has been done in scholarship on ancient philosophy, for example in discussions of Plato's *Sophist*. (See G. E. L. Owen, "Plato on Not-Being," and L. Brown, "Being in the Sophist: a Syntactical Enquiry," both in *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, G. Fine, ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 416-54 and 455-78. See more generally C. Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'to Be' and the Concept of Being," *Foundations of Language* 2 [1966] and the response by M. Matten, "Greek Ontology and the 'Is' of Truth," *Phronesis* 28 [1983]: 113-35.) I avoid this because of the disanalogies between verbs for "to be" in Arabic and those in Greek or English. For example there is no infinitive and no present tense copula in Arabic. Indeed it is worth emphasizing that the words al-Kindi and his translators use for "being" are exclusively *nouns*, even though they translate verbs. *Anniyya*, for example, is a noun that often translates *einai*, which is an infinitive. See further F. Shehadi, *Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982), 5-9 for discussion of the similar distinction between the "complete" and "incomplete" uses of *kana*, 31ff. for the absence of the copula.

36. D'Alverny (1959), esp. 73-4. See also A. Ivry, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1974), 120-1 and note on FP 97.13.

37. D'Alverny, op. cit., 72-3.

38. Similar uses of *anniyya* appear in two treatises by al-Kindi that directly parallel the text of FP, *R. fi Mahiyya ma la Yumkinu an Yakuna la Nihaya wa ma alladhi yuqalu la Nihaya lahu (On the Quiddity of what Cannot be Infinite, and What is Said to Have Infinity)*, Abu Rida 194-8, and the aforementioned *On the Oneness of God and the Finitude of the Body of the World* (see n. 29).

39. There would be a problem of individuation if we wanted to take the "beings" to be simple, since by definition they would have no features or predicates by which they could be distinguished. With this in mind we should note the ambiguity of the definition of

"generation" cited above, where al-Kindi said that it is the "coming-to-be of being (*ays*) from non-being." Here *ays* could refer to a sheer existence that has been generated, and that will underlie an essence predicated of it. But given the cognate definition of creation that invokes the coming-to-be of a plurality of "beings," we should perhaps translate the earlier definition as the "coming-to-be of *a* being from non-being."

40. Likewise, the very question al-Kindi is considering, namely whether a thing can be the cause of its own essence, may more intuitively be seen as the question of whether something can be the cause of itself. One might therefore raise the question whether *dhat* should be translated as "self," not "essence," throughout the passage in question. The problem with such an interpretation is that the argument proceeds by making a conceptual distinction between *al-shay'*, the thing, and its *dhat*. But if *dhatuhu* here means "itself," then there is no such distinction to be made. Hence other translations of FP also take *dhat* to signify essence throughout this passage; indeed, this translation is defended on similar grounds at RJ 105-6, *ad* n. 36.

41. *R. fi annahu Tujadu Jawahir la Ajsam (That There Exist Incorporeal Substances)*, Abu Rida 265-9 at 266.1-3.

42. Al-Kindi acknowledges that substances corrupt through the loss of their essential properties in *That There Exist Incorporeal Substances*. Indeed this is the distinguishing feature of essential, as opposed to accidental, properties: ". . . by 'essential' I mean what is such that, when it is separated from the thing, the thing corrupts. The accidental is what may be separated from what it is in, without the latter corrupting" (266.10-11). This renders puzzling a second definition of "substance" given in *On the Definitions and Descriptions of Things* (see n. 32): "It is also said: [substance] is what does not admit of generation and corruption . . . in what is proper to its substance (*fikhass jawharihi*)." This definition seems to state unequivocally that substance does *not* corrupt. I would suggest that the difficulty may be resolved either by supposing that the second definition refers only to separate, incorruptible substances (like God), or, more likely, that we are meant to read a great deal into the phrase "in what is proper to its substance." That is, al-Kindi may be saying that substance does not admit of generation or corruption and remain the same substance. So this is just to reiterate that substances undergo only accidental change.

43. This is suggested by the fact that the attributes removed from "man" in passage (A) are the standard examples of essential predicates: living and rationality.

44. For example, he begins *Metaphysics* Z.1 by observing that "of the many ways of saying 'being' (*tou ontos*) it seems that the primary one is what something is (*to ti estin*), which refers to substance (*ousian*)" (1028a). Thus, to return to the distinction between what a thing is and that it is, being in the primary sense is for Aristotle associated with what a thing is, not merely that it is. Even though Aristotle

is aware of the distinction, he is not particularly interested in it. His lack of interest seems to stem from the fact that it does not in his view *add* anything to our notion of substance. For example, in *Metaphysics* G.4, Aristotle says that "existing man and man are the same, since nothing else is clarified about an utterance by saying it twice, once about a man, and again about an existing man" (1003b).

45. Here I am simply assuming that the distinction does not appear earlier—in Plotinus himself, for example. Others have claimed, wrongly I think, that Plotinus does distinguish existence from essence, for example K. Corrigan, "A Philosophical Precursor to the Theory of Existence and Essence in St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 48 (1984): 219-40. If we were to find the distinction in al-Kindi and his translators, those who hold that the distinction is made by Plotinus might simply think of the Kindi circle texts as providing an accurate interpretation of the *Enneads*. (My thanks to Verity Harte for this erenic proposal.)

46. Ibn Sina, *Isharat wa 'l-Tanbihat*, S. Dunya, ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif bi-Misr, 1957-60), vol. 3, 443.3-5.

47. Ibn Sina, *al-Shifa': al Ilahiyyat*, G. Anawati, ed. (Cairo: Organisation Générale des Imprimeries Gouvernementales, 1960), 347.10.

48. See, for example, *al-Shifa': al Ilahiyyat*, 38.11-39.4.

49. FP 123.3-124.16 [RJ 41.3-43.7].

50. See A. M. Goichon, *La Distinction de l'Essence et de l'Existence d'après Ibn Sina* (Paris: de Brouwer, 1937), 41-4. In G. Anawati, *La Métaphysique du Shifa'* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1978), *anniyya* is variously translated as "essence" and "être" depending on the context (see, e.g., 85 and 87, respectively).

51. *al-Shifa': al-Nafs*, G. C. Anawati and S. Zayid, eds. (Cairo: 1975), V.7, 225. (Also see *Avicenna's De Anima*, F. Rahman, ed. [London: Oxford University Press, 1959], 255.9.) For Ibn Sina's terminology here, see D'Alverny, *Anniyya-Anitas*, 81. On the different versions of the argument, see M. Marmura, "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' in Context," *Monist* 69 (1986): 383-95.

52. Ibn Sina, *Isharat wa 'l-tanbihat*, vol. 3, 460.1-462.1. Translation from L. E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 78.

53. F. Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958): 1-16. For a more recent defense of the same position, see D. Burrell, "Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish Thinkers," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, N. Kretzmann and E. Stump, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. 65-70.

54. See especially Ibn Sina's commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, in A. Badawi, ed., *Aristu 'inda 'l-'Arab* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Nahda al-Misriyyah, 1947), 37-84; G. Vajda, French trans. "Les notes d'Avicenne sur la 'Théologie d'Aristote,'" *Revue Thomiste* 51 (1951): 346-406.

55. I am grateful for comments and suggestions from David Burrell, Richard Taylor, members of the Philosophy Department at King's College London, and the anonymous referees at the Journal.

Source: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40.3 (2002) 297-312