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Lost in Translation

The Shaping of Prime Matter in Arabic Tradition

Master Thesis Ancient Civilizations: Classics
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وكل الذين ترجموني ذبحوني ... دون أن تكون لديهم نية القتل

Nizār Qabbānī, *Arabs bite the moon of poetry*.

Introduction

Language has often been recognised as an opaque medium for conveying meaning. Many a linguist has theorised how language can sometimes stand disconnected from meaning, and how it may in fact reshape it. Meaning does not merely reside in words but emerges through use, context and structure. Wittgenstein, for instance, has argued in his *Philosophical Investigations* that a word's meaning lies not in a fixed essence but in its dynamic use within a specific context. Similarly, Saussure posited that linguistic signs derive their significance relationally and never in isolation. Most theorists agree therefore on the fact that language does not transparently deliver meaning but actively mediates it.

It is precisely this mediating character of language that makes it perpetually open to different interpretations. On the one hand, this openness can be seen as a barrier between source and receiver, where meaning is susceptible to alteration or misunderstanding. On the other hand, this same quality can also be a source for creative potential. Poetry, for instance, intentionally exploits this openness as a way to layer meaning beyond the literal. There is another practice marked by the same linguistic fluidity, albeit involuntarily: translation. A translation is twice removed from any 'original meaning' – if such a notion is coherent at all. It has passed through two interpretative veils, both of the translator and that of the reader. It thus becomes, in Platonic terms, akin to a copy of a copy.

That translation can alter meaning is hardly surprising. Scholars of translation have long noted that meaning is often distorted by translation. Bassnett's *Translation Studies* offers a clear historical overview and outlines the central issues that define the field. Venuti similarly provides a compendium of foundational essays that have shaped translation theory, from Walter Benjamin and Roman Jakobson to late-twentieth-century theorists.[1] Other notable figures, such as Steiner and Derrida, also delve into the many issues of translation and raise the question whether any text can be properly translated at all.[2]

In some contexts, the inflection of meaning occurs by design. Apter's *The Translation Zone*, for instance, discusses how translation can be politically and culturally framing and how it can sometimes withhold meaning strategically.[3] However, in most cases such distortion of meaning is unintentional. One discipline in which this is the case is philosophy, since any divergence from the source text can be particularly consequential. At its core, *philosophia* aims at clarity, understanding and the pursuit of truth. With that in mind, translators of philosophical texts

[1] Bassnett (2002); Venuti (2012).

[2] For example, Steiner's *After Babel* (1975) and, similarly, Derrida's *Des Tours de Babel* (1985). Translation studies constitute as vast interdisciplinary field, drawing contributions from linguistics, philosophy, literary theory and cultural studies. The present introduction mentions only a selection of foundational works, as a comprehensive overview would fall outside the scope of this thesis. For broader orientation, two additional reference works may be noted: Biguenet and Schulte (1992), an influential anthology of key essays, and the four-volume *Handbook of Translation Studies*, edited by Gambier and van Doorslaer (2010–2013).

[3] Apter (2006).

would therefore naturally strive for the highest fidelity. As philosophy is devoted to the uncovering of truth, the translator generally likewise aims not to let that truth be veiled or harmed in translation. Yet precisely because philosophical arguments often hinge on fine distinctions, even slight *unintentional* translation shifts can steer the interpretation of the text.

Previous studies on the intersection of philosophy and translation have predominantly concentrated on the philosophical reflection on the nature of translation itself. Benjamin, for instance, examens the concept of translation in Plato and Seneca. Arrojo sets out Nietzsche's approach to the subject, while Pym provides a more general and historical account to philosophical engagement with the topic.[4] What remains largely unexamined, however, is the reversed question: how has translation shaped the philosophical tradition?

Some scholars have partially addressed this issue, such as Venuti in *The Translator's Invisibility*, where he has demonstrated how translation can influence the reception and canonisation of literary works.[5] Similarly, d'Hondt has noted that mistranslation can generate debates that are, strictly speaking, irrelevant for the direct themes of a source text.[6] Yet these observations only gesture toward a much deeper problem. Scholarship tends to devote considerable attention to how philosophy speaks about translation, but rarely to how translation, in turn, speaks back to philosophy. Moreover, discussions of the 'untranslatable' are typically confined to poetry, as if the challenges of translations are more pronounced in poetry than in other domains.[7] We readily criticise when a literary critic interprets a poem in translation, being unable to fully grasp its meaning, but rarely pose the analogous – and equally pressing – question for philosophy. For how can a commentator interpret a philosophical text if they remain entirely dependent on translation?

This neglect is striking given that much of ancient Greek philosophy circulated for many centuries in translation. Major thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great often relied on Latin translations, and their influential commentaries could have therefore been shaped by these translational discrepancies.[8] Especially within this commentary tradition, even minor deviations in wording could introduce conceptual shifts that long outlived the texts they intended to transmit. It is therefore beyond surprising that so little scholarly attention has been devoted to an issue of this significance, one that may well have shaped the contours of modern philosophical thought and our own understanding of the ancient tradition.

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[4] Benjamin (1989); Arrojo (2010, pp. 247–251); Pym (2007, pp. 24–44).

[5] Venuti (1995).

[6] D'Hondt (2000, pp. 155–171).

[7] Study has shown that, particularly in philosophical terminology, meaning often becomes 'lost' in translation. Philosophical concepts are more difficult to render in another language because of their textual connotations and nuance. Ricoeur (2005, pp. 12–13), for instance, argues that it is almost impossible to translate philosophical terminology *mot á mot*. Thillet (2000, pp. 271–286) likewise notes that newly coined philosophical terminology can sometimes shape thinking.

[8] For an overview of the role played by Latin translations in the medieval commentary tradition, see Brams (1997, pp. 9–22).

The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement

Not only was the Latin commentary tradition successful and widely spread across Europe, but the Arabic tradition was also profoundly influential in later philosophical debate. Scholars and commentators such as ibn Sīnā and ibn Rushd – in the West known as Avicenna and Averroes – were at times as influential (if not even more so) as the works of Plato or Aristotle themselves. The Arabic commentary tradition was to a great extent made possible by the Graeco-Arabic translation movement. This translation movement, which reached its peak in the tenth century CE, marked a period in which a vast number of Greek academic and scientific texts were translated into Arabic. Centred in Baghdad, this intercultural enterprise flourished, supported by state patronage and private elites who maintained large libraries of manuscripts. The most well-known of these was the Bayt al-Ḥikmah, although the exact nature and scope of its existence remain uncertain.[9] A central figure in this movement was the philosopher al-Kindī, who attracted a circle of renowned translators, such as Ibn Nāʿima al-Ḥimṣī. By commissioning the translations of Greek texts, this scholarly network made Greek philosophy accessible, providing the foundation for al-Kindī's own extensive philosophical writings. Produced in the movement's earlier stages, these translations were subsequently refined or replaced by the school of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, whose work proved among the most influential of the era.[10]

The efforts of these translators were crucial for the transmission of Greek texts both to the Arab world and to the Latin West. Many Greek works reached European readers via Arabic-Latin translations, often produced in Toledo by translators such as Gerard of Cremona, who drew upon earlier Andalusian scholarship.[11] The range of translated material was vast, spanning poetry, medicine, mathematics and beyond, yet it was above all philosophy that came to dominate the intellectual arena of the medieval Arab world. The translators thus enabled great thinkers such as ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābi to reflect upon and engage with Greek philosophy. A quick glance at the *Fihrist* demonstrates the scale of this effort: nearly the entire Aristotelian corpus was translated into Arabic, in some cases more than once.[12]

The immense translation project, which spanned nearly three centuries, and the influential Arabic commentary tradition that emerged from it, makes clear how essential it is to understand the role translation played in the later Arabic – and European – philosophical debate. To examine this question, the present study turns to a long-standing debate within both the European and Arab traditions, whose very formulation may have been shaped by translation: prime matter.

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[9] For the foundational study done on the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, see Gutas (1998). For a more recent study, see Aly (2023). For a discussion on the nature and existence of the court library, Bayt al-Ḥikmah, see Lyons (2014, pp. 90–95).

[10] Endress (1997, pp. 43–76) discusses the translations and philosophical texts produced in the Kindī-circle. For the translations carried out within the school of Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, see Salama-Carr (1990).

[11] Haddour (2008, pp. 203–226) provides an excellent analysis in his chapter, arguing that Europe's inheritance of Greek heritage was not always direct, but was often mediated by the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, which later facilitated the Arabic to Latin translations.

[12] *Al-Fihrist*, Ibn al-Nadīm (ed. Flügel, pp. 246–252; ed. Bayard Dodge, pp. 594–606).

Prime Matter

The nature of prime matter (πρώτη ὕλη) has long been a complex and disputed issue in the history of philosophy. The concept is conventionally attributed to Aristotle, although sometimes its origins are traced to Plato's *Timaeus*.[13] Prime matter is traditionally conceived as a primordial and utterly formless material substrate underlying substantial change.[14] This view can already be observed in early commentators such as Alexander of Aphrodisias and is most fully developed and systematised in the medieval tradition, especially in the writings of Thomas Aquinas.[15] Aquinas characterises it as *pura potentia*, a wholly indeterminate underlying subject capable of receiving any form whatsoever, including, crucially, the primary elements.[16]

This 'traditionalist' view has only recently been subject to change. King was the first to critically examine this hitherto largely unquestioned interpretation.[17] By analysing a range of Aristotelian passages, he argued that the traditional view is not textually grounded and results instead from an 'elementary error in interpretation' within the later Aristotelian tradition.[18] King contends that what later thinkers called 'prime matter' is, for Aristotle, always *proximate matter*.[19] Moreover, the most fundamental substratum of change are the elements, *not* a rudimental type of matter that is completely void of form. For King, Aristotelian matter is always bound to actual, physical bodies and therefore cannot be described as 'pure potency'.

King's objection to the traditionalist view was initially met with much resistance. Many scholars swiftly rose to defend the standard interpretation. Solmsen, for instance, writes in response to King: 'Whatever the Tradition, Mr. King's bad boy, may have foisted on Aristotle, the concept of Prime Matter has its origin in Aristotle's own writings'.[20] King's critique thus ignited a lasting debate between those who questioned or revised the traditional view and its defenders – the 'friends of prime matter', as Charlton has it.[21] Ultimately, King's perspective gained considerable support and can now be considered the dominant scholarly position. Even for those who remain unconvinced, King's critique has at the very least ensured that the

[13] For a detailed study on Plato's account of the receptable, its relation to prime matter and its development in the Neoplatonic tradition, see de Haas (1997). In accordance with the dominant commentary tradition, this study will treat prime matter as an Aristotelian concept, making only limited reference to Plato.

[14] I use the term 'traditional', in line with most secondary literature, because this interpretation of prime matter was already adopted by the earliest commentators and remained largely unquestioned well into the twentieth century. The traditional view became standard through antiquity, medieval thought, and early modernity (Charlton, 1970, p. 144).

[15] Viano (2023, p. 122); Byrne (1995, p. 200).

[16] Aquinas, *de potentia,* q.1, a. 7: Praeterea, sicut materia prima est pura potentia, ita Deus est purus actus. *Furthermore, just as prime matter is pure potency, so God is pure act.*

[17] King (1956, pp. 370–389). It should be noted that earlier commentators had also raised doubts about the traditional interpretation of prime matter – most notably Philoponus, as shown by de Haas (1997, Introduction, xii–xiii). Yet King was the first modern scholar to subject this interpretation to critique.

[18] Ibid. p. 370.

[19] To maintain terminological clarity, I will render the Greek πρώτη and the Arabic الأول as 'first' to refer to *proximate matter* and 'primary' to refer to *prime matter* in the traditional sense.

[20] Solmsen (1958, p. 243).

[21] Charlton (1983, p. 197).

traditional view is no longer accepted without scrutiny.[22] However, a more recent defence of the traditional interpretation has been advanced by Lewis, signalling an ongoing revival of interest in re-evaluating prime matter.[23]

Why is the concept of prime matter the subject of such controversy? Although the expression itself (πρώτη ὕλη) occurs frequently in Aristotle's corpus, and even though certain passages seem to support the so-called traditional interpretation, many key texts are notoriously obscure. The same passage can often support multiple, even conflicting, readings (as recent scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated). Moreover, these debates frequently depend on extremely fine linguistic details, where issues of translation or reliance on particular text editions play a decisive role in shaping the arguments.

For instance, in *De Gen. et Corr.* 329a24–29 Robinson argues that Charlton's rejection of prime matter here rest upon a mistranslation.[24] Joachim's Oxford translation renders here 'there is *a* matter of the perceptible bodies', and Charlton builds upon this to claim that the relevant matter must be the (distinct) elements.[25] Robinson counters that the Greek τινα is not adequately captured by the English indefinite article. If translated more precisely as 'some *specific* matter', the passage would instead support the view that Aristotle is referring to one single substratum, i.e. prime matter.[26] This exchange illustrates how the debate depends not on a strictly philosophical point but on a linguistic nuance mediated through translation.

Structure and Focus of this Study

Prime matter is thus a particularly fruitful subject for examining translational nuances and their impact on the subsequent commentary tradition. Moreover, the modern scholarly attention devoted to prime matter demonstrates that it remains contested even today, and that a clearer understanding of its historical development would shed light onto our present consensus – or lack thereof – concerning its nature. For this reason, I believe it is necessary to undertake a more precise study on how the traditional interpretation of *prima materia* was actually shaped.

While it is true that substantial research on the commentary tradition and its formation of the standard view of prime matter exists, these studies do not address the possibility that such views may have been externally influenced or imposed.[27] This research gap is surprising, given the fact that the Latin and Arabic commentary traditions were mainly dependant on the *Aristoteles Latinus* and *Arabus* corpora, as previously noted. Their inability to consult the original Greek

[22] For a recent literature review on the prime matter debate, see Viano (2023, pp. 121–122).
[23] Lewis (2008, pp. 124–145).
[24] Robinson (1974, pp. 179–180); *De Gen. et Corr.* 329a25: ἡμεῖς δὲ φαμὲν μὲν εἶναί τινα ὕλην τῶν σωμάτων τῶν αἰσθητῶν (…).
[25] Charlton (1970, pp. 132–136).
[26] Charlton replies in his *Rejoinder* that τινα does not require this 'specific' matter to be one single substrate but can still refer to the elements as underlying matter (1983, pp. 201–202). It is striking, however, that he does not acknowledge what seems to me the more obvious point, namely that τινα already implies a degree of determinacy, which hardly sits comfortably with Robinson's reading of the substrate as wholly indeterminate.
[27] For the ancient commentary tradition, see de Haas (1997); for the Arabic tradition, mainly ibn Rushd and ibn Sīnā, see Belo (2007, pp. 55–90;159–186), for the Latin tradition, see Pasnou (2011, pp. 35–52).

text, combined with the translational nuances and textual ambiguities that are detectable only in the source language – as shown by recent scholarship – are clearly significant factors in explaining the development of the doctrine of prime matter. This prompts us to wonder: might the traditional view, primarily shaped by the commentary tradition, have been externally affected?

To address this question, the present study investigates how translation may have influenced the interpretation of prime matter in later commentary traditions. Given the scope of this thesis and in order not to stretch the inquiry beyond what can meaningfully be addressed here, this study will only focus on the Arabic translations of Aristotle, since any significant deviations from the Greek are more likely visible in a pair of languages that do not share a common ancestor – Greek being Indo-European and Arabic Semitic.

The thesis focuses on the Aristotelian works dealing with natural philosophy, as questions on prime matter arise mainly in discussions on matter, form and change. In light of this, I have restricted the scope of this study to the following texts:

- ***Physics***: translated by Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn (ed. Badawī).[28] Rushd's commentary survives only in Latin, for which I will use the standard printed edition Iunta 1562, Vols. 4.

- ***De Caelo***: first translated by ibn al-Biṭrīq and later revised anonymously (ed. Badawī). Rushd's commentary survives in its entirety in Latin (eds. Arnzen & Carmody), and in part in Arabic (ed. Asʿad Jumʿa).

- ***Metaphysics***: translated partly by an anonymous 'Ustādh' at the commission of al-Kindī and partly by Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn. Both the translation and Rushd's commentary survive fully in Arabic (ed. Bouyges).

The Arabic translation of *De Generatione et Corruptione*, a text central to the debate of prime matter, is unfortunately not extant and since access to the Arabic source is indispensable for identifying deviations from the Greek, the work is excluded here. Given the nature of this thesis, the later Arabic-Latin translation cannot serve as a substitute either.

To assess the impact of these translations on interpretation, this study turns solely to the long commentaries by ibn Rushd. His commentaries circulated widely in the Arab world and acquired great authority in the West through their Latin translations.[29] If it can be shown that ibn Rushd's understanding of prime matter was shaped by translational deviations, then the consequences extend far beyond his own thought, influencing the subsequent Latin tradition as well.

[28] The edition of Book VIII has been revised by Arnzen (2021).
[29] For the transmission of *Averroes* in the West, see Burnett (1999, pp. 257–299).

The long commentaries are especially valuable because of their structure: Rushd cites the Aristotelian lemmata – introduced by formulae as 'Aristotle said' – immediately followed by his remarks. This makes it possible to trace, often on an individual word level, how the Arabic affected his interpretation. Since even minor deviations in wording could decisively shape the commentary, it is crucial to identify which translations Rushd relied upon. Fortunately, modern scholarship has established the textual basis for each of his commentaries.[30] We know that Rushd relied on the translations listed above, which makes it possible to reconstruct the trajectory from the Greek original, through the Arabic translation, to his philosophical interpretation. In addition to this, it should be noted that not all of Rushd's commentaries have survived in Arabic. This, however, will pose no obstacle for the present inquiry, since the focus lies not on the exact language of preservation but on his interpretation shaped by the Greek-Arabic translation. The Arabic versions provide the base text, while the commentaries function as witnesses to their reception.

The method which I will pursue combines two complementary approaches. First, I identify and compare deviations between the Greek and the Arabic rendition, focusing especially on key Aristotelian passages that have traditionally been interpreted as referring to prime matter. I then examine how Rushd responded to these passages in his commentary. Second, I reverse this procedure by locating all places where Rushd explicitly mentions *prima materia* and then examining whether these remarks were prompted by translational errors. Together, these approaches provide a balanced view of the extent to which translation influenced interpretation. In the following chapters, I will examine a selection of representative cases from the *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, and *De Caelo*. The chapters will therefore be thematically

[30] *Metaphysics*: Rushd's commentary transmits the translation by Ustādh and Isḥāq verbatim within the lemmata. *Physics*: scholarship confirms through both the Latin and Hebrew versions of the lemmata and commentary that Rushd made use of Isḥāq's translation (Lettinck, 1994, pp. 180–184;). Though, Glasner (2009, p. 14) argues that Rushd's commentary preserves a fuller version of Isḥāq's translation than the surviving ms. Leiden Warner 583 (the base for Badawī's edition). She suggests that Rushd had access to a 'better' exemplar. However, her appeal to Mansion (1934, p. 208) for support is not convincing. Mansion's remark on the Arabic-Latin version being 'nettement différent' referred specifically to the divergence between the two Arabic-Latin translations (not Moerbeke's Graeco-Latin version) and does not speak to the completeness of the underlying Arabic translation. He states directly: 'Ensuite, les éditions d'Averroès, qui donnent la version de Michel Scot, présentent pour le passage en litige un texte nettement différent de celui des mss. de la version de Gérard de Crémone'. If anything, Mansion underscores the instability of the Latin transmission. Consequently, Glasner's claim about a superior exemplar, which rests primarily on the internal evidence of the LC itself, falls short, as this source presents a potentially distorted, mediated witness far removed from the Arabic original ibn Rushd actually held. Given these considerations, the analysis in this study will rely on the established text of Isḥāq's translation, as presented in Badawī's edition. For a full overview on the textual transmission of Isḥāq's translation see Arnzen (2021, introduction, xix–ccxl).
De Caelo: Rushd himself remarks in his commentary that he did not have access to the more reliable translation of Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn, but only the version produced within the Kindī circle:
nos enim non habemus nisi translationem Alchindi, translationes autem veriores sunt Isaac ('for we do not have [a translation] except for the one of al-Kindī, but the translations of Isḥāq are more accurate').
Rushd relied on the rendering by ibn al-Biṭrīq (Arnzen & Carmody, 2003 pp. 14–15). For an extensive overview of the textual transmission of the Arabic translations of *De Caelo*, see Endress (2017, pp. 213–275).

structured, each centred on a different Aristotelian work and including the textual analyses of all relevant passages in Arabic, Greek and Latin. Further findings will be briefly noted at the end of each chapter.

Chapter I *Physics*

The *Physics* is one of the most important works for the debate on prime matter, especially books I–II, where Aristotle discusses change and the underlying substrate for change, themes that naturally invite reflection on prime matter. In what follows, I present the Greek text, the Arabic translation, and ibn Rushd's commentary, each with an English rendering, followed by a brief analysis of how the translational deviation altered Aristotle's writings and influenced Rushd's interpretation.

As noted in the introduction, the translation employed by Rushd, was that of Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn. Unlike the *Metaphysics*, for which he largely depended on the translation of the anonymous Ustādh, Isḥāq's rendering proves to be of considerably higher quality, as it contains far fewer substantive deviations from the Greek. At the same time, ibn Rushd's commentary on the *Physics* frequently invokes prime matter, which raises the question of how far this interpretation is guided by the translation and how far it represents his own philosophical insights. For this reason, in addition to the comparison with the Greek text, I will also highlight several cases where prime matter appears in his remarks without a direct prompt from the text or the translation.

Physics 191a24–32

This passage (see appendix 1.1.) recalls the *aporia* faced by the early philosophers, who, in seeking the truth about the nature of beings, became entangled in the problem of generation: whether something can come to be from being or from non-being. Aristotle's Greek formulation frames the *aporia* as faced by the 'ancients', while the Arabic translation subtly alters this perspective by inserting the phrase 'and into which we ourselves have fallen':

> وها نحن آولاء ، نشرع في بيان آن الشك الذي وقع فيه المتقدمون ، وما وقعنا فيه نحن ، يَحلّ على هذا النحو وحده
>
> *And firstly we begin to explain that the doubt into which the ancients fell – and into which we ourselves have fallen – is solved only in this way.*[31]

> Ὅτι δὲ μοναχῶς οὕτω λύεται καὶ ἡ τῶν ἀρχαίων ἀπορία, λέγωμεν μετὰ ταῦτα. ζητοῦντες γὰρ οἱ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν πρῶτοι τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὴν φύσιν τὴν τῶν ὄντων ἐξετράπησαν οἷον ὁδόν τινα ἄλλην ἀπωσθέντες ὑπὸ ἀπειρίας, καί φασιν (…).
>
> *Let us say these things: that the aporia of the ancients can only be solved this way. For the first philosophers looking for the truth and the nature of beings were diverted as if onto some other path being driven by ignorance, and they said (…).*

[31] All following translations from Arabic, Latin or Greek into English are my own, unless otherwise noted.

By introducing 'we ourselves', the Arabic includes Aristotle in this *aporia*. Rather than simply reporting on the Pre-Socratic errors, he is presented as also having fallen into the same perplexity. This minor shift seems to have influenced Rushd's commentary, who writes:

> Et hoc significat etiam, quod ipse invenit hanc causam, scilicet primam materiam et istum numerum principiorum. Et intendebat per 'antiquos' Parmenidem et Melissum.
>
> *And this also shows that he himself (i.e. Aristotle) discovered this cause, namely prime matter, and this number of principles. And by 'the ancients' he meant Parmenides and Melissus.*

Modern scholarship remains divided on whether prime matter is a concept that Aristotle himself explicitly formulated, or a theoretical construct inferred by later commentators.[32] The Arabic translation, however, slightly shifts this nuance: it portrays Aristotle not merely as analysing prime matter as a theoretical postulate for explaining change, but as personally arriving at the concept as a solution to this *aporia*. Rushd's interpretative stance is likely shaped by the translators framing, which inserts Aristotle himself into the very *aporia* he then resolves. By depicting Aristotle as both participant in and solver of the problem at hand, the translation presents him as actively arguing for prime matter as its solution. Consequently, Rushd inherits a version of the text that presents prime matter as an insight achieved by Aristotle himself, thus anchoring his own commentary in a modern debate that views prime matter as a genuinely Aristotelian principle.

[32] This division follows the scholarly debate between those who defend the traditional interpretation of prime matter and those who challenge it (see Introduction for an overview of this literature). The former maintains that Aristotle himself explicitly commits to the doctrine of prime matter, whereas the latter argues, in the words of Charlton (1983, p.197), that modern 'friends of prime matter' have forcedly reconstructed the notion from Aristotle's writings, rather than finding explicit evidence that he, indeed, endorsed such a notion.

Physics 193b20–23

In the Greek text (see appendix 1.2), Aristotle's question concerns τὴν ἁπλῆν γένεσιν (simple generation), which here is best understood as substantial generation, in the sense of elemental changes – for example, when air becomes water and vice versa. The translation here is striking: τὴν ἁπλῆν, usually rendered مبسط (simple), is instead translated as المطلق (absolute, essential). Since المطلق almost always conveys the sense of 'absolute', this unusual choice shifts the scope towards absolute or ultimate generation, that is, the very initial coming to be of essences or substances at all. This divergence is significant. The Greek is likely dealing with substantial generation of already existing simple bodies (such as the elements) and not of an 'ultimate' generation out of nothingness or a bare substratum. The Arabic, instead, redirects the inquiry to the underlying conditions or origins that make generation itself possible.

Rushd's commentary follows this Arabic framing. He explains:

> Et forte intendit, quod forma dicitur duobus modis, de habitu et privatione existente in prima materia. Ista enim privatio quomodo non est privatio simplex, immo est sicut forma materiae.
>
> *And perhaps he intends that form is said in two ways: of disposition and of privation existing in prime matter. For this privation is not a simple privation but is rather like a form of matter.*

'Privation is not a simple privation but rather like a form of matter', this formulation suggests that privation, when found in prime matter, functions as a quasi-form. In other words, privation marks the 'first determination' that allows *prima materia* to exist in actuality (since prime matter only is purely potential and never exists by itself). The contraries, namely the four elements, then become the first actualised states or forms of matter and so the first things to be generated and corrupted:

> (…) quae sunt quattuor qualitates, et quod ista contraria sunt prima omnium quae generantur et corrumpuntur.
>
> *(…) which are the four qualities and that these contraries are the first of all things that are generated and corrupted.*

It is precisely this rendering of 'absolute generation' in the Arabic that leads Rushd to reinterpret privation as itself a form of matter and to link it explicitly to prime matter. While Aristotle himself already states that privation is in a certain respect also form (καὶ γὰρ ἡ στέρησις εἶδός πώς ἐστιν), it seems as if he regards privation as a form in the sense that it serves as a formal opposite (e.g., the non-white in relation to white). Rushd, on the other hand, guided by the Arabic translation of *absolute* generation, redirects this discussion from the level of

elemental change to the question of how matter itself becomes actualised from a substrate. By contrast, Aristotle's text leaves the issue at the level of substantial change among the elements, without pressing into this deeper ontological substrate.

Within this context, Rushd's formulation *sicut forma materiae* ontologically expands on Aristotle's notion of privation as a quasi-form. For Rushd, privation in prime matter is understood as the absence of any determinate *material* form, and it is precisely this absence that eventually leads to the minimal actualisation of the elementary contraries once this privation is superseded. Consequently, for this *absolute* generation – as the translation has it – and the supersession of this material privation to occur, there must be something underlying it, an ultimate substrate that Rushd identifies as *prima materia*. It should be noted, however, that according to Rushd privation is only conceptually separable from prime matter; in reality it is always inherently present with it as a quasi-composite.

Supplementary Text Passages

As outlined in the introduction of this thesis, I have also adopted a reversed approach by examining all the places in Rushd's *Long Commentary* on the *Physics* in which *prima materia* is explicitly mentioned. Interestingly, he invokes the subject repeatedly, revealing a continuous preoccupation with the concept. I have noticed that in most cases these references cannot be explained by translational inaccuracies but instead arise from Rushd's own interpretative reading of Aristotle. It is through this philosophical engagement that these digressions on prime matter occur.

To clarify the character of these occurrences, I have grouped all of these loci into two categories: 1) passages that invite or accommodate a digression on prime matter; 2) passages that in themselves do not relate to prime matter, and where a digression seems out of place. The latter group can, in turn, be subdivided into (a) passages that are thematically adjacent and thus allow a loosely motivated digression, and (b) passages that are genuinely remote and in which Rushd's remarks appear interpretatively strained.

As for the first category, I can conclude that – especially throughout books I and II – Rushd is aligned with a longer commentary tradition, including Aquinas, who likewise associate these passages with prime matter. His remarks are therefore unsurprising, even if they reveal a consistent interpretive commitment. As for the second category, these would be the passages where Rushd mentions prime matter, but where a digression on prime matter seems forced or contextually out of place, since neither Aristotle's text not other commentators typically connect them to prime matter:

Greek text	Subject	References	
		Translation	Commentary
Physics 193b4–8	nature as form[33]	ed. Badawī p. 86	ed. Iunta 52F
Physics 194a20–27	material vs. formal causes[34]	ed. Badawī pp. 94–95	ed. Iunta 56 G–H
Physics 195a4–14	types of causes[35]	ed. Badawī pp. 102–104	ed. Iunta 60 F–H
Physics 196b10–16	causality and chance[36]	ed. Badawī p. 117	ed. Iunta 66 D–C
Physics 215a25–215b24	velocity through resistance of different media[37]	ed. Badawī pp. 364–366	ed. Iunta 158 D–K
Physics 221b24–31	excursion on time being the measure for anything perishable or generable[38]	ed. Badawī pp. 457–458	ed. Iunta 194 C–F
Physics 226a24–26	infinite regress of change[39]	N/A	ed. Iunta 215 E

[33] Rushd explains how matter and form are never separate, except by definition – as Aristotle also argues here – apart from prime matter, which is a completely formless type of matter.

[34] Prime matter is mentioned as a reaction to ibn Sīnā, who claims that natural sciences only concern proximate matter, while – according to Rushd – it should also concern the ultimate causes, i.e. prime matter.

[35] He explains how form is also a cause for matter, since matter cannot be actualised without form, and more specifically *prima materia*, which he stresses as the ultimate cause.

[36] He explains that events happen 'sometimes', 'usually' or 'by chance', because there is an underlying substrate equally disposed toward opposite outcomes. Prime matter functions as a substrate for chance events here.

[37] Rushd invokes prime matter to mark the distinction: elemental bodies, composed of prime matter and simple forms, require a medium and encounter resistance, whereas celestial bodies, being incorruptible, lack this matter–form duality.

[38] Rushd mentions prime matter to show why time cannot measure all forms of non-being. It measures privations only in proximate substrates (finite, bounded), not in relation to prime matter (infinite, unbounded).

[39] To explain that motion also indeed happens in substances, Rushd explains how motion happens in substantial change.

Contextual Remarks on the Additional Passages

The loci listed in the table above can be grouped according to their degree or relevance for prime matter. The general pattern that emerges is the following: the closer a passage lies to books I-II, the more plausible it is that Rushd's digression on prime matter arises from an attempt to remain consistent with the overarching themes of these books, which centre on change and its underlying substrate (i.e. prime matter); the further removed from these topics that could in principle invite a discussion on prime matter, the more interpretatively strained such digressions become. As mentioned earlier, I have categorised these passages accordingly by their gradient of relevance to topics that could reasonably prompt a reference to prime matter. An example of each group will be discussed below to illustrate this categorisation.

Group 2a: cases that are to some degree relevant to discussions of prime matter, albeit not traditionally interpreted as such nor naturally lending themselves to such a discussion.

- Physics 193b4–8
- Physics 194a20–27
- Physics 195a4–14
- Physics 226a24–26

Group 2b: cases that are more 'remote' from topics that could lead to a discussion on prime matter and where Rushd's digressions are clearly interpretatively stretched.

- Physics 196b10–16
- Physics 215a25–b24
- Physics 221b24–31

As for group 2a, these passages fall within books I-II and do not, in themselves, invite a discussion on prime matter. Nonetheless, Rushd frequently introduces brief remarks on *prima materia*. His observations are, on the one hand, coherent within the general context – especially if one reads these books as providing support for the concept of prime matter – yet, on the other hand, somewhat extraneous to Aristotle's immediate argument. A representative example is *Physics* 193b4–8 (see appendix 1.3).

In this passage, Aristotle defines 'nature' in relation to both matter and form. He concludes that form is 'more truly nature' since actuality rather than potentiality determines what something is. The focus, therefore, lies here on defining nature and on identifying whether it should be understood primarily as form or matter. The matter referred to here, is to be understood as *proximate matter*, since Aristotle is discussing matter, which is potentially a determinate form, not absolute formless matter. The example of 'man' confirms that Aristotle's focus is on particular, formed substances not on matter *in abstracto*.

Rushd's commentary on the passage reads:

> non separatur a materia in esse, ita quod possit esse sine materia, sed est separata a materia secundum diffinitionem tantum. Materia autem differt a forma, sed numquam denudatur a forma. Immo, cum separatur a forma, induit aliam, quoniam si denudaretur ab omnibus formis, scilicet prima materia (…).
>
> *It is not separated from matter in being, in such a way that it could exist without matter, but it is separated from matter only according to definition. Matter, however, differs from form, but it is never stripped of form. Indeed, when it is separated from one form, it takes on another, because if it were stripped of all forms, as prime matter is (…).*

Here, Rushd does not limit himself to explaining, as Aristotle does, that matter and form are separable in being and only distinguishable in definition (οὐ χωριστὸν ὂν ἀλλ᾽ ἢ κατὰ τὸν λόγον). Instead, he extends the discussion by introducing prime matter. Aristotle's purpose was only to briefly explain that matter and form are distinct, and to eventually conclude that form is closer to the definition of nature than matter. Rushd, however, lingers on the first part of the argument and uses it to elaborate on the separability of matter and form, noting that prime matter is the exception to this rule as it is the only matter entirely void of form.

This reference to prime matter in a passage concerned with form and matter – topics closely related to the concept – is unnecessary for Aristotle's argument here, as he is simply discussing the priority of form in defining nature. Rushd's remark then is not forced, in the sense of being entirely irrelevant or odd within this context, but it does extend Aristotle's reasoning beyond its original intent.

Another example in which Rushd mentions prime matter in a context that is somewhat out of place yet nonetheless reveals how and why he engages with the concept, can be found in *Physics* 226a24–26 (see appendix 1.4). In this case, Rushd's discussion is shaped by the earlier commentary tradition. Aristotle argues here that motion does not occur in every category, but only in quality, quantity and locality. This is because motion presupposes a contrary, something which cannot be found in, for instance, substance. Although this passage is strictly concerned with the classification of motion and does not, in itself, invite a reference to prime matter, for a commentator as Rushd, it cannot be viewed in isolation from topics as accidental and substantial change. In his commentary he follows Aristotle's logic first but then expands, reporting Alexander of Aphrodisias' distinction between composite and simple substances. According to Alexander, as Rushd recounts, simple bodies contain some sense of contrariety. Here Rushd mentions prime matter, referring to Alexander's commentary:

> (…) quae sunt in potentia in prima materia.
> (…) *which exist potentially in prime matter.*

Rushd ultimately does not agree with Alexander, arguing instead that the contrariety of simple bodies pertains to their qualities rather than their substance. His reference to prime matter here may be prompted by Alexander's discussion, but it also reveals that he is engaging with a conception of prime matter that he seems to understand in the same terms as Alexander himself. Rushd reproduces the expression *quae sunt in potentia in prima materia* without further explanation, almost unquestioningly, which suggest that he recognises it as a familiar explanatory principle rather than a view requiring defense or elaboration. Therefore, it shows that the idea of what prime matter entails had become part of a shared interpretive framework within the Aristotelian commentary tradition – one which Rushd indisputably adopts here as well.[40]

Group 2b comprises passages that more clearly reflect Rushd's particular emphasis on prime matter. In these instances, his references to prime matter are not simply overextensions to Aristotle's arguments (as with group A) but rather appear entirely disconnected to the immediate context and are hard to reconcile with Aristotle's text. They occur in sections dealing with topics unrelated to the usual discussions of form, matter and change. Instead, they discuss themes such as motion, velocity and chance, where any digression on prime matter seems remarkedly inventive and even creative at times. To illustrate this, I will briefly discuss *Physics* 196b10–16 (see appendix 1.5).

Aristotle discusses three types of occurrences, those that happen always, those that happen usually and those that happen 'per chance'. He concludes that chance exists for events that occur neither always nor usually, but that it refers to accidental events that do not follow any regular cause. In this passage then, Aristotle's concern is not with discussing matter or change, but merely with causality and the frequency of events.

Rushd situates his own reading within a broader tradition. For instance, he reports that Themistius restricted chance to things that occur rarely, whereas Avicenna extends the notion to include cases in which different outcomes are equally possible. Rushd himself mentions that chance can be found in both cases: things that happen rarely and in things that are equally possible to happen or not.

[40] Unfortunately, Alexander's commentary on the *Physics* is not extant, nor was it ever translated into Latin. All surviving fragments have been collected and edited by Rashed (2011). It did, however, not preserve any testimonium for this specific passage (Phys. 226a24–26), apart from wat Rushd himself has transmitted here. It is therefore impossible to determine with absolute certainty whether the reference to prime matter originates with Alexander or was introduced by Rushd himself. The present interpretation follows the most plausible view, that Alexander did make such a remark: Rushd's reference to Alexander is explicit and Alexander himself frequently describes prime matter in terms consistent with the later classical conception of it. A similar argument as reported here can also be found in Alexander's *Commentary on the Soul*, which is fortunately extant (Caston, 2012, pp. 32–35).

Toward the end of this section, however, he introduces an entirely new dimension to the discussion, by inquiring why contingency exists in the first place:

> Dicamus igitur, quod prima materia est parata ad recipiendum duo contraria aequaliter. Et ideo receptio utriusque contrariorum est ei naturalis.
> *Let us therefore say that prime matter is prepared to receive both contraries equally, and that this twofold receptivity is natural to it.*

Here Rushd explains how prime matter is equally receptive to both contraries, such as form and privation, and, by analogy, to the opposite of occurrence and non-occurrence in the case of chance. In his reading, the potentiality of prime matter is the foundation for contingency itself. Things can happen or fail to happen because *prima materia* is open to both possibilities.

This reference to prime matter is striking, since Aristotle is only concerned with the frequency and causes of events, not with their material substrate. Rushd, by contrast, extends Aristotle's argument and transforms a logical analysis of chance into a physical one. In doing so, he imposes a materialist framework onto a passage that gives no textual or thematic indication of such concern. His inclusion of prime matter here therefore reveals a consistent commitment to prime matter. Even when the context does not call for it, Rushd seeks to ground all causal explanations in the receptivity of prime matter.

Summary of Findings

This chapter has demonstrated that the translation has influenced Rushd's account of prime matter at least to some extent. In one case (*Ph.*191a24–32) the Arabic translation invites him to present *prima materia* as explicitly Aristotelian, while in another (*Ph*. 193b20–23) he is prompted to engage the debate without an immediate textual cue. Yet, on the whole, the translation of the *Physics* is sufficiently faithful that it cannot be said to have misled him entirely into a commitment to prime matter. Instead, Rushd's own philosophical commitments also explain why he consistently interprets Aristotle through the lens of prime matter. The additional passages from the commentary show that Rushd's appeal to prime matter cannot always be ascribed to translational distortions. He persistently introduces the concept even in places where we might not expect such a reference. This indicates that, especially after completing his commentary on the earlier books of the *Physics*, Rushd was already committed to the systematic account of *prima materia* and sought opportunities to extend it to a wider range of problems. The translation of the *Physics* then, appears to have merely confirmed the interpretative assumptions he likely already maintained.

Chapter II *De Caelo*

The book *On the Heavens* is not a work that immediately engages with the concept of prime matter. Nevertheless, it does contain some passages of interest, especially given the fact that Rushd refers to *prima materia* with some frequency in his commentary. The commentary itself is only fully extant in Latin, for which I will rely on the edition by Carmody and Arnzen. The Arabic translation by ibn al-Biṭrīq, edited by Badawī, is of a lesser quality than Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn's *Physics* (a point also remarked by Rushd himself), though it remains superior to the Arabic rendering of the *Metaphysics*. As a result, the influence of the translation on the commentary is more evident than in the *Physics*, yet less problematic than in the *Metaphysics*. As with the previous chapter, I will present a selection of passages from all three source texts, alongside an English translation, followed by a brief discussion of other findings.

De Caelo 306b11–20

In this text passage (see appendix 2.1), Aristotle argues that the elements, especially water and air, cannot have fixed shapes of their own, since they take the figure of the place in which they are contained. He further concludes that the underlying subject must also be formless and shapeless, comparable to the 'all-receptive' substratum of Plato's *Timaeus*. He also holds that the elements must be understood as matter for composites, capable of transforming into one another when their qualities are removed. In the Arabic version, however, two significant deviations from the Greek open the door to a reading in terms of prime matter. First, the rendering of:

> ἀειδὲς καὶ ἄμορφον δεῖ τὸ ὑποκείμενον εἶναι
> *it is necessary that the underlying subject is both formless and shapeless.*

As:

> الموضع الحامل لسائر الأشياء لا صورة له ولا شكل
> *The place, the bearer of all things, has no form nor shape.*

This rendition goes beyond the Greek description of a merely formless subject, adding the notion of a subject as a 'bearer of all things' (الحامل لسائر الأشياء). This is precisely how prime matter is later characterised, as that which can receive all forms in potentiality. That Rushd was influenced by this formulation, is clear from his commentary. He repeats the language of universal receptivity in explicitly prime matter terminology:

> quia igitur prima materia receptibilis omnium formarum, non debet habere aliam formam omnino.
>
> *Therefore, since prime matter is receptable of all forms, is it not necessary at all to have a form [itself].*

Here Rushd is clearly echoing the Arabic wording. The *ḥāmil* (bearer) of all things becomes the Latin *prima materia receptibilis omnium formarum*, now explicitly tied to prime matter.

Second, where Aristotle only refers to the underlying subject (τὸ ὑποκείμενον) and compares it to Plato's 'all-receptive', the Arabic explicitly names it as:

> الهيولى القابلة لجميع الأشياء
>
> *matter, receptive of all things*

The translator forces a materialist interpretation of receptivity here, which is absent from the Greek itself. Aristotle's ὑποκείμενον is described merely as a formless substratum, and Plato's τὸ πανδεχές is likewise not to be understood as matter in any sense; it is traditionally conceived as a kind of spatial receptacle rather than a material substrate. The Arabic translation, however, introduces the heavily connotational term *hayūlā* (matter) precisely at the point where Aristotle only draws an analogy with this 'all-receptive'. For a reader such as Rushd, this combination is particularly suggestive: 'matter' that is 'receptive of all things' is precisely the standard definition of prime matter.

Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that both the Arabic version and ibn Rushd himself refer only to 'those men' (هؤلاء, isti), neither naming Plato nor the *Timaeus* here. Rushd is normally quick to acknowledge Platonic material, and the absence of any explicit reference here strengthens the impression that both translator and commentator understood the passage primarily in terms of (prime) matter, without necessarily connecting it to the Platonic notion employed by Aristotle here.[41] Therefore, the choice to insert *hayūlā* (matter) in this context almost inevitably invites the reader to think of prime matter.

[41] It should also be noted that Rushd did not attribute to Plato any doctrine of prime matter. He writes in his commentary on *De Caelo* 301a 18–20 (ed. Carmody & Arnzen 544):
et etiam Plato numquam percepit primam materiam. *And Plato never conceived of prime matter at all.*
This further strengthens the argument that Rushd's invocation of prime matter here reflects the translation rather than Aristotle's reference to the Platonic chōra.

As for this second deviation, Rushd also introduces matter (الهيولى) into the discussion, now effectively read as *prima materia*:

> Et cum hoc quod contingit in elementis, similiter contingit in prima materia, et magis in prima materia (…) sicut isti etiam dicunt de materia recipiente omnia, id est, contingit eis dicere elementa non habere figuram, quia dicunt primam materiam non habere formam substantialem.
>
> *And what happens in the elements likewise happens in prime matter, and even more in prime matter (...) just as they also say concerning the matter that receives all things, that is, it follows for them to say that the elements do not have a figure, because they say that prime matter does not have a substantial form.*

The Arabic's use of *hayūlā* (matter) has thus primed Rushd to treat this passage as a natural place to introduce prime matter, even though Aristotle in Greek never mentioned it here. Rushd also uses this Arabic addition of *hayūlā* (matter) as a springboard for distinction between ordinary matter and *prima materia*:

> Et ideo omnis materia habens formam est receptibilis quarundam formarum tantum, et propter hoc istae materiae propriae habent formas quas recipiunt; prima autem materia est universalis, cum nullam formam habeat omnino.
>
> *And therefore, every matter having a form is receptable of only certain forms, and for this reason these proper matters have the forms which they receive; whereas prime matter is universal, since it has no form at all.*

He emphasises that whereas 'every matter having a form is receptive only of some form', prime matter alone is universal, 'since it has not form at all'. Rushd's commentary thus demonstrates here how the Arabic deviations, by supplying words as 'bearer of all things' and by explicitly naming 'matter' as receptive of all things, influences the reader to interpret Aristotle's formless substratum in the strong sense of prime matter.

De Caelo 312a25–b2

This passage in *De Caelo* (see appendix 2.2) has long attracted attention in modern scholarship, largely due to the problematic phrase: οὕτω δὲ τέτταρας ὡς μίαν μὲν ἁπάντων τὴν κοινήν. Some take it to imply a common matter for all four elements, almost an anticipation in prime matter;[42] others argue that the four elements themselves are 'as one' serving collectively as the common material for composite bodies;[43] still others prefer a weaker reading, namely that the elements share certain commonalities, allowing reciprocal generation. Accordingly, the passage need not imply more than that the four elements share some commonality that underlies their reciprocal generation, while each nevertheless maintains its own distinct being. The Arabic translation, however, diverges substantially. It omits Aristotle's problematic phrase and instead inserts:

> لست آعني العنصر الأول، فإنه واحد فقط
>
> *I do not mean the first element, for that is only one.*

This formulation explicitly introduces the idea of a 'first element', which is effectively identified as prime matter by Rushd. The subsequent clause فلذلك صار كون هذه العناصر بعضها من بعض (and for that reason these elements come to be from one another), makes prime matter the very *reason* for this elemental generation. Rushd follows this wording directly in his commentary:

> Quia enim habent unam materiam, ideo possunt generari ex invicem.
>
> *Since they [the elements] have one matter, it is thus possible to be generated from one another.*

Another significant deviation lies in the rendering of ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶναι ἕτερον (but their being is different). On the Greek alone, the only point Aristotle seems to make is that even if the elements transform into one another, their being remains distinct: water may have the ability to become air, and vice versa, yet, when actualised, they remain two distinct entities. The Arabic, instead, has:

> وهي وإن كان كون بعضها من بعض وآنيتها ضد كونها
>
> *Although they are generated from one another, their individual existence is opposed to their generation.*

This shifts the sense: instead of simply stressing the distinctness of substances, it frames a polarity between (1) the unity of the process of generation (all arise from the same source) and

[42] For instance, Solmsen (1958, p. 247), cf. Dancy (1978, p.389).
[43] For instance, King (1956, p.384).

(2) the diversity of their actual existence. Rushd reads the passage exactly this way in his commentary, similarly as the phrase above:

> quia materia eorum est una, fuit possibile ut haec elementa generarentur ex invicem
>
> *because their matter is one, it was possible that these elements are generated from one another.*

The Arabic phrasing makes it natural for him to argue that reciprocal generation proves a single substratum, *prima materia*. Thus, while Aristotle only meant that the elements remain distinct beings despite change, the Arabic translator opened the door to Rushd's stronger claim that their distinct actualities stand 'opposed' to their shared origin in one matter. Where Aristotle's text can be read as merely affirming the distinct beings of the elements, the Arabic version – and Rushd commentary following it – transforms the passage into an argument for a universal substratum. In this way the translator's deviations decisively shaped Rushd's reading reinforcing an interpretation of prime matter.

Supplementary Text Passages & Contextual Remarks

As with the *Physics*, Rushd occasionally associates prime matter with some of the passages in *De Caelo* that are not traditionally interpreted this way. Although such instances are less frequent that in the *Physics*, there remain a number of striking examples where the connection cannot be attributed to the Arabic translation. One such case would be *De Caelo* 288b22-30 (see appendix 2.3)), where Aristotle discusses the impossibility of infinite accidents in motion. He argues that motion must be determinate, making infinite acceleration and deceleration impossible. Rushd adopts this theory but expands it by distinguishing between terrestrial (finite) motion and celestial (infinite) motion. He raises the apparent paradox that celestial motion is eternal, while their motive power remains finite. To resolve this tension, he appeals to prime matter, writing:

> cum ergo motor et res mota abscinduntur a prima materia, non abscindetur suum esse neque suum opus, quod est movere et moveri.
> *thus, when the mover and the thing moved are separated from prime matter, their being and their action, which is to move and to be moved, are not cut separated.*

Rushd introduces prime matter here to explain why infinite variation is impossible for sublunary bodies: prime matter, as the underlying substrate of terrestrial things, imposes limits on motion and duration. Celestial bodies, by contrast, are separated from prime matter; and because they

lack this material limitation, their motion can be eternal even though their motive power remains finite.[44]

Another highly extraordinary example can be found at *De Caelo* 301a16–20 (see appendix 2.4), where Aristotle discusses the unity of the cosmos and the natural motions of the elements. He specifically criticises Empedocles's cosmology here, who held that the cosmos is constructed from separated elements and later brought together by Love. Aristotle, however, insists that our cosmos is composed of combined elements, and therefore must have begun in a unified state. Rushd, again, adopts this critique but expands the argument and explains why the theory of a disordered pre-cosmos cannot be possible. He specifically targets Plato here and redirects this discussion towards prime matter, writing:

> Et etiam si confessi fuerimus ei quod intelligendum est ex non ordinatione privationem ordinationis (…) impossibile est ut intelligatur ex eo quod est non ordinatum prima materia (…).
> *And even if we were to confess to him that the privation of order should be understood from 'non-order' (...) it is impossible that it is understood from this that what is 'not ordered', is prime matter (...).*

Even if one were to interpret the cosmos disorder as a *privation* of order – namely, the condition of prime matter prior to receiving the form of the cosmos – it still fails, as celestial bodies are part of the cosmos and do not consist of prime matter at all. They possess no contraries and therefore have no material capable of receiving privation. Thus the cosmos, as a whole, could never have existed as a disordered state of prime matter. As becomes clear, the Greek text passage itself contains no reference to prime matter, nor is such a notion relevant to Aristotle's point. It is Rushd who introduces prime matter hypothetically (only to reject it), as part of his argument against the idea of a primordial cosmic disorder.[45]

[44] For the Arabic translation, see (ed. Badawī, pp. 252–253).
[45] For the Arabic translation, see (ed. Badawī, p. 320).

Summary of Findings

This chapter has shown, as in the case of the *Physics*, that the Arabic translation of *De Caelo* contains several deviations from the Greek text that significantly shape Ibn Rushd's reading of prime matter. Two passages in particular illustrate this effect. In the first (*Cael.* 306b11–20), the Arabic introduces the notion of a substrate as the 'bearing all things'. This formulation has been added by the translator in such a way, that even a scholar as King would likely defend prime matter here, had he been presented with this Arabic text rather than the Greek. In the second (*Cael.* 312a25–b2), the translator omits Aristotle's notoriously vague remark and replaces it with a clear reference to a 'first element', which ibn Rushd then unambiguously identifies with prime matter. These deviations are far more substantial than those encountered in the *Physics* and directly support the later, established interpretation of prime matter as a single universal substrate, able to receive all forms.

To provide a complete picture of Rushd's use of prime matter in the *De Caelo* commentary, this chapter also examined a number of passages where his references to *prima materia* cannot be attributed to the Arabic translation. As the examples above show, he occasionally introduces prime matter in contexts where Aristotle does not require it, whether that be in discussions of motion (*Cael.* 288b22–30) or of cosmic order and disorder (*Cael.* 301a16–20). What emerges is that although the Arabic version often supplies the conceptual vocabulary that encourages a reading of prime matter, it is ultimately Rushd himself who incorporates the concept into a broader cosmological framework.

Chapter III *Metaphysics*

As the only Aristotelian work to fully survive in Arabic both in translation and in commentary, the *Metaphysics* provides a unique case study. The Arabic translation which Rushd has used, combined the version of the anonymous Ustādh and that of Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn. Though, the main body of the translation, including all examples discussed below, was primarily carried out by the 'Ustādh'. This translation has been discussed in earlier scholarship. Halper examines the Arabic rendering of book Δ alongside the Hebrew translation, while Bertolacci offers a detailed account of the Arabic transmission of the *Metaphysics*.[46] As in the previous chapters, the following sections present the Greek text, the Arabic translation, and ibn Rushd's commentary. A close reading of all three will culminate in a final analysis of how the translational deviations altered Aristotle's writings and shaped ibn Rushd's interpretation.

Metaph. Δ.4 1014b14–16

In this text passage (see appendix 3.1), the Greek is relatively restrained: it emphasises that στοιχεῖον is 'the first thing inherent in each thing' (τὸ πρῶτον ἐνυπάρχον ἑκάστῳ), focusing on relational and internal priority – much like proximate matter – rather than a metaphysical primacy. By contrast, the Arabic translation adds a layer of intensity by doubling the notion of 'firstness':

> أول كل شيء من الأشياء
> *the first amongst everything.*

And

> هو في كل واحد من الأشياء أول
> *the first in every single thing.*

The first phrase in particular (the first amongst everything) introduces an ontological tone, suggesting that the element is the first principle or origin of all beings, whereas the second phrase aligns more closely with the Greek, indicating that the element is simply what first inheres in each individual thing – in the sense of being most immediate or fundamental within its internal composition. The repeated emphasis on 'primeness' in the Arabic rendering likely intensified Rushd's inclination toward a metaphysical interpretation. His commentary shifts from defining the element in structural or compositional terms to describing it as the ontological foundation of all things.

[46] Halper (2010, pp. 28–39); Bertolacci (2005, pp. 241–275).

He writes:

> هذا الاسطقس يجب آن يكون هو السبب في سائر الاسطقسات
> *this element must be the cause of all other elements.*

This phrase moves beyond Aristotle's immediate topic to define the element. Ultimately, this culminates in an explicit identification of τὸ στοιχεῖον with prime matter:

> وهذا الذي ذكره هو المادة الأولى
> *and this is what he mentioned as the prime matter.*

This passage illustrates how the Arabic rendition subtly reorients Aristotle's account of στοιχεῖον. Where the Greek merely frames the element as the first component inherent within each composite (i.e. proximate matter), the Arabic's doubled emphasis on this firstness and the characterisation of the element as 'first among everything' introduces an ontological primeness. This lexical intensification primed Rushd to move beyond Aristotle's definition and to treat the element here as a foundational substrate, which he identifies as prime matter.

Metaph. Δ.4 1015a9–12

In this text passage (see appendix 3.2), we can observe a somewhat odd rendering of ἡ ὅλως πρώτη – a phrase Aristotle uses to denote prime matter 'in general' or 'universally' (from Greek ὅλος, 'whole'). Instead of capturing this universal sense, the translator renders it as واولاً بالحقيقة (primary in reality or truly primary), a phrase that lacks the universal connotation of the Greek. Ibn Rushd demonstrates a clear understanding of the translator's intent. He adopts the phrase واولاً بالحقيقة verbatim but refines its meaning in his commentary, defining it as الهيولى الأولى المشتركة للجميع (prime matter common to all things). In doing so, he clarifies the traditional dual conception of prime matter: relative and proximate versus universal and primary.

The choice to translate ὅλως, which in the Greek text bears no necessary commitment to prime matter, as 'properly' or 'truly' (بالحقيقة), redirects the passage toward a more explicitly ontological interpretation. The semantic colouring of this choice becomes especially clear when placed against the background of Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose commentaries Rushd demonstrably used (e.g., in the *Long Commentary* on the *Physics*). Alexander frequently uses expressions such as ὕλη κυρίως (matter in the proper sense) to refer specifically to prime matter.[47] Since κυρίως is almost invariably translated into Arabic as *bil-ḥaqīqa* (بالحقيقة),[48] a rendering like 'properly' would naturally evoke a reader familiar with Alexander the conceptual register of κυρίως-matter, i.e. prime matter.
It is therefore entirely plausible that Rushd, already familiar with Alexander's usage, understood the translation as signaling a reference to prime matter, in a context already favourable to such an interpretation.

That ibn Rushd indeed understood the phrasing *bil-ḥaqīqa* (بالحقيقة) in this way emerges not only from his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, but also from his *Epitome* of the *Metaphysics*. He reproduces phrasing analogous to the translator's and again ties it to the traditional interpretation of prime matter:

> واذا كان ذلك كذلك فالمواد صنفان صنف موضوع للتغير الذي يكون في الجوهر وهو اخص باسم المادة وصنف موضوع لسائر التغاييرالاخر وهذا يخص في الاكثر باسم الموضوع .

[47] For instance, in his treatise *on the Soul* he uses precisely this phrasing when articulating what later becomes the traditional account of prime matter (ed. Bruns, 4.1–7):
ἔσται δὴ τὸ τοῖς ἁπλοῖς σώμασιν ὑποκείμενον καὶ ἡ τούτων ὕλη ἁπλῆ τις φύσις καὶ χωρὶς εἴδους, ἄμορφός τε καὶ ἀνείδεος οὖσα καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος κατὰ τὸν αὐτῆς λόγον, (…) καὶ τὴν τοιαύτην φύσιν **κυρίως** ἄν τις ὕλην λέγοι. (…) ἐν οἷς δὲ τὸ ὑποκείμενον ἁπλοῦν, ἡ τούτων **ὕλη κυρίως** (…).
Thus, the substrate to simple bodies and their matter will be a certain, simple nature and separate from form, being shapeless and formless and without figure by its own account (...) and about such a nature one would say 'matter properly'. (...) in those cases, the substrate is simple, their matter is the proper [matter].
[48] For example, in the Arabic translation of Alexander's *Mantissa* (de visu), the term κυρίως is likewise rendered as بالحقيقة (ed. Sharples, 142.9); (ed. Gätje, 147.15).

> *If this is the case, two kinds of matter [have to be kept apart]: one kind which is the substrate of change in substance (this is what is called 'matter' properly), and one kind which is the substrate of all other [kinds of] change (this is what is most properly called 'substrate').*[49]

In sum, the translator's decision to render ὅλως as *bil-ḥaqīqa* adds an ontological force not present in the Greek. When read alongside Alexander's use of κυρίως to denote prime matter, the connotations of this choice become clear. Rushd was therefore predisposed to interpret the translation as signalling prime matter.

Metaph. Z.3, 1029a21–23

Aristotle's description of matter as 'neither a this, nor a quantity, nor anything else' in *Metaphysics* Z.3 (see appendix 3.3) appears inside a hypothetical scenario. In that scenario, Aristotle considers what would happen if we defined substance only as 'that of which other things are predicated'. On that definition, one would end up calling matter itself a substance – a result Aristotle ultimately rejects. As part of this reductio, he describes a process of 'stripping away' all the accidents of a substance (its qualities, quantities, and other categorical features) until only 'bare' matter remains:

> μήτε τὶ μήτε ποσὸν μήτε ἄλλο μηδὲν.
> *neither a this, nor a quantity, nor anything else.*

The secondary literature debates two related questions here. The first is whether Aristotle intended this stripping to describe a real, legitimate process or merely a thought experiment meant to expose the weakness of the definition of substance. The second question, if the process is taken as legitimate, revolves around what exactly is uncovered by the stripping.[50] Does it reach all the way to prime matter (pure potentiality, completely without form), as, for instance, Robinson has argued?[51] This need not be the case. The stripping process may instead be understood as leaving proximate matter still connected to form, or as arriving at the spatial three-dimensional extension**,** a minimal substratum rather than absolute formlessness. A further possibility is simply taking the passage as hypothetical, serving only as a reductio against the definition of substance as 'that of which other things are predicated'. The Arabic commentary aligns with the first reading, viewing this passage as a 'legitimate process'. For the Greek phrase ἢ καθ᾽αὑτὴν*,* ibn Rushd adds:

[49] *Epitome Metaph.* (ed. Rodríguez, 1919, pp. 70–71). Translation by Arnzen (2010, p. 85).
[50] E.g., Dancy (1978, pp. 394–98) has already pressed the point that one must ask 'how far the stripping goes' before deciding whether the remainder is truly formless.
[51] Robinson (1974, pp. 183–87).

> الموجود بذاته
> *that exists in itself*

This addition makes the stripped matter sound not like a mere conceptual placeholder, but something that actually exists. If this is his understanding, then the Arabic translation's intensifier البتة (absolutely, entirely) could have further primed him to think of this matter as completely devoid of any form or category, exactly like prime matter, rather than proximate matter.

This impression is reinforced in the commentary's concluding remarks (Bouyges, p. 780–1):

> واما الهيولى الأولى فيبحث عنها العالمان، اما الطبيعي فيبحث عنها من حيث هي مبدا التغير، واما الإلهي فيبحث عنها من حيث هي جوهر بالقوة.
> *As for the primary matter, it is examined by both sciences: the natural scientist examines it inasmuch as it is the principle of change, and the divine philosopher examines it inasmuch as it is substance in potentiality.*

Taken together, Rushd's addition of 'existing in itself' (الموجود بذاته) and the Arabic translation's stronger negation البتة (absolutely, entirely) make the stripped matter sound like something that is not only real but also utterly and completely devoid of any form or categorical determination. This pushes the description away from anything resembling proximate matter and toward the idea of a substratum that is, in actuality, nothing – a pure potentiality for all forms. This understanding resurfaces in the commentary's concluding statement, where primary matter is described as جوهر بالقوة (substance in potentiality), a formulation that encapsulates precisely this notion of an actually formless but potentially all-receptive entity.

Metaph. H.2, 1042a32–36; b1–8

In the translation of this passage (see appendix 3.4), the insertion of ثابتًا (fixed, stable) has no parallel in the Greek text but carries significant philosophical weight. It suggests that the substrate is not merely something that underlies, but that it is something permanent or enduring – a notion closely aligned with prime matter, rather than *proximate matter.* The latter, being already formed or actualised in a particular state (e.g., water or air), is susceptible to change itself and cannot underlie substantial change in a way that guarantees continuity or permanence. This difference in translation appears to inform Ibn Rushd's tafsīr on the passage. He writes:

> وإنما الفرق بينهما آن الموضوع هو في التغير الذي في الجوهر بالقوة، وهو في سائر التغير بالفعل، وكان وجوده وسطًا بين الذي بالفعل والعدم.
>
> *However, the difference between both of them is that in substantial change the substrate is in potentiality, while in other changes it is in actuality. Its existence lies between actuality and non-being.*

Here, Rushd affirms that the substrate of substantial change exists in potentiality and, importantly, remains throughout the transformation, standing between actuality and non-being. This accords with the 'traditional' reading of prime matter, which views 'prime matter' as pure potentiality, never actual in itself, and thus capable of persisting through substantial changes without itself being a formed substance. In contrast, proximate matter – the more immediate substrate such as water for wine – is already actualised in some way and therefore cannot serve as the permanent underlying subject of substantial change or generation. Proximate matter changes along with the substance; it cannot persist unchanged if the substance itself is destroyed or regenerated. Thus, it cannot function as the fixed substratum, as described in the Arabic.

The conclusion, then, is that the Arabic translator's choice to add ثابتًا, subtly but decisively shifts the philosophical framing of the passage. It aligns more naturally with the metaphysics of prime matter, and ibn Rushd, working from this version, articulates a theory in which the substratum in substantial change is permanently potential, unlike in accidental changes where the subject is already actual. Additionally, in his *Epitome* of the *Metaphysics*, where he comments on this passage as well, he explicitly refers to *prima materia* and identifies it as such.[52] Thus, the Arabic translation not only diverges from the Greek, but arguably conditions a metaphysical reading in favour of prime matter yet again demonstrating how linguistic choices in translation can bear heavily on philosophical interpretation.

[52] *Epitome Metaph.* (ed. Rodríguez, 1919, pp. 65–66), translated by Arnzen (2010, pp. 80–81).

Summary of Findings

The Arabic translation of the *Metaphysics* is markedly less accurate than the versions of the *Physics* and *De Caelo*. As a result, the deviations in the current chapter are both more substantial and more frequent, and they decisively shape Rushd's interpretation. In this chapter, I studied four key text passages central to the doctrine of prime matter, each exhibiting significant translational issues.

In the first passage (*Metaph.*1014b14–16), I showed that the Arabic's doubling of 'primeness' shifted Aristotle's explanation of the element toward an ontological primacy, which Rushd took to understand as prime matter. In the following passage (*Metaph.* 1015a9–12), I have argued that the rendering ὅλως as *bil-ḥaqīqa* steers the passage toward prime matter, a move reinforced by Alexander's usage of κυρίως. The third passage (*Metaph.* 1029a21–23) provided an even stronger example: the intensified negation البتة (absolutely, entirely) recasts the substratum as a purely potential, actually formless entity, which is precisely the traditional definition of prime matter Rushd echoed in his commentary. Finally, the last passage (*Metaph.* 1042a32–36; b1–8) demonstrates how the insertion of *thābitan* (ثابتًا) shifts the account of substantial change toward a permanently potential substratum, also leading Rushd to identify Aristotle's subject explicitly as *prima materia*.

Overall these analyses confirm the broader pattern observed in the *Physics* and *De Caelo*. The Arabic translations did not merely transmit Aristotle but provided conceptual cues that made certain the traditional interpretation of prime matter far more inviting for Rushd.

Conclusion

This study began with the assertion that language is a fragile medium for conveying meaning, and that translation can only magnify this instability – particularly in philosophical contexts. While substantial scholarly research has explored how philosophy reflects on translation, far less attention has been given to how translation might actively shape philosophical arguments themselves. This lacuna is striking, given that for much of the medieval world, philosophical texts circulated primarily in translation, not in their Greek originals. The Graeco-Arabic translation movement and the subsequent Latin tradition stand as a testimony to this.

As many influential commentators of this period worked exclusively from translations, it becomes crucial not only to investigate how they themselves dealt with translational discrepancies, but also to understand how their following intellectual traditions may have been equally contaminated. For if translation does influence interpretation, then it shapes not only the immediate and personal philosophical interpretations but also the reception history taken collectively and even our own modern reading of ancient philosophy, which builds upon an inherited commentary tradition.

For this reason, I examined the concept of prime matter, a notion which, as ancient, medieval and modern commentary tradition show, has always been contested. Its interpretive instability arises from lexical and conceptual ambiguities already present in Aristotle's Greek, making the concept especially vulnerable in translation, where even small shifts in vocabulary or syntax can have substantial consequences. This thesis therefore studied how translation may have contributed to the development of the traditional interpretation of prime matter.

Although translation between any two languages involves conceptual and terminological challenges, the linguistic distance between Greek and Arabic often made philosophical translation particularly demanding. Therefore, I examined the three Arabic translations of Aristotle's *Physics*, *De Caelo* and *Metaphysics*, and identified all deviations from the Greek that could possibly influence the interpretation of prime matter. I then studied the reception of these translations in the long commentaries of ibn Rushd, who offers an ideal case study. We know precisely which translations Rushd had used, he quotes his translation verbatim or uses lemmata, he comments on a word-by-word basis and his enormous influence in both the Arabic and Latin traditions ensured that any interpretive choices in his commentary would have a long and influential afterlife. To gain a comprehensive picture of how translation exactly shaped Rushd's thought, I adopted a complementary approach. I collected all passages where Rushd himself mentions prime matter independently of the text, allowing me to assess the extent to which translation reinforces his own philosophical commitments.

In the first chapter, I discussed the *Physics*. The Arabic translation, attributed to the notable Isḥāq ibn Ḥunayn, was the most accurate of all three studied in this thesis. As a result, the translation did not, on the whole, significantly shape ibn Rushd's interpretation. In two cases the translator's choices subtly steered meaning: the first aligned him with a modern scholarly

debate, while the second more clearly led him toward the traditional view of prime matter. This is why generally it can be said that the translation did not primarily influence Rushd here. Yet overall it became clear, as the supplementary texts have proven, that Rushd's commitment to prime matter stemmed primarily from his own philosophical interpretations. This chapter demonstrated that he already possessed a well-formed conception of prime matter, which he invoked even where Aristotle's Greek text offered little encouragement to do so.

In *De Caelo*, the subject of my second chapter, the translation was noticeably less precise, allowing for more space for Rushd's pre-existing commitments to find textual support. Two significant examples showed how serious mistranslations (both omissions and additions) pushed the text closer to a traditional reading of prime matter. These deviations portrayed a formless substrate for change, precisely the features attributed to prime matter in the later tradition. Ibn Rushd's commentary unmistakably reflects this, as he adopts this idea and visibly connects it to prime matter.

The third chapter addressed the *Metaphysics*, by far the least accurate translation. Four key texts illustrate how translational deviations substantially altered Aristotle's meaning, consistently pulling the text toward the traditionalist reading. Rushd follows these cues regularly. In virtually every place where the translation diverges from the Greek, his commentary aligns with the interpretive direction introduced by the Arabic. Thus, at least for the *Metaphysics*, it can be said with certainty that the translation played a decisive role in shaping his understanding of prime matter.

While it is true that Rushd already had partially formed a conception of prime matter – shaped by his own philosophical insights and by earlier commentators such as Alexander of Aphrodisias – it must also be concluded that the translations he used played an active role in reinforcing and directing these commitments. Some translations were more accurate than others, and consequently influenced him to varying degrees, but the overall pattern is consistent. All three translations offered, at least to some extent, textual cues that favoured the traditional interpretation of prime matter.

More crucially, *none* of the translations provided any textual pressure toward readings that challenge this interpretation. If Rushd were to have access to the Greek originals, he would have encountered precisely the kinds of ambiguities that make modern scholars cautious. The simple fact that modern commentators disagree, while working directly from the Greek, illustrates how significant these ambiguities are. Without access to those vulnerable passages, a reader would have no reason to ask why Aristotle never explicitly endorses prime matter. When the very phrases that weaken the traditional interpretation disappear in translation, and when other phrases simultaneously strengthen it, translation can be said to have indeed shaped Rushd's view of prime matter.

Translation, then, is not a passive conduit, attempting merely to preserve meaning. It must be treated as an active agent in the production of philosophical thought. In this sense, not only ibn Rushd should be taken as having influenced the later development on prime matter's

debate, but also the role of the translator, who silently directed it. This thesis therefore contributes not only to the field of translation studies by illustrating the interpretive power of translation in philosophical transmission, but also to the history of the debate on prime matter itself. It shows how prime matter should be historically situated and how both medieval and modern discussions must be understood in light of the transmission history of the texts themselves. That prime matter continues to be of interest, both philosophically – and more recently even in contemporary physics[53] – demonstrates the enduring relevance of this inquiry.

A complete account of how translation shaped the traditional understanding of prime matter, however, requires extending the investigation beyond the Arabic tradition. The Graeco-Arabic translations did not mark the end of the text's life, but the beginning of another major translational movement into Latin, where both Arabic commentary and translation became foundational for Western philosophical thought. If the Arabic versions already predisposed Rushd toward certain interpretations, the Latin translations of both Aristotle and Rushd introduced yet another linguistic filter (Greek–Arabic–Latin) deepening the interpretive uncertainties already created by the Arabic translations.

I would therefore suggest future research to examine the Arabic–Latin transmission as well, not only to determine how faithfully the Latin translators rendered both Aristotle and Rushd, but also to assess how far the Latin tradition further built on the inheritance of *prima materia*. Only by tracing the concept across all three linguistic stages – Greek, Arabic, and Latin – can we fully understand how translation has shaped philosophical thought.

As interpretation already proves unstable even within a single language – as the modern debates on prime matter, working directly from the Greek, clearly show – the interpretive stakes are considerably higher when a text must traverse linguistic boundaries. Ibn Rushd faced two layers of mediation: first the movement from Greek into Arabic and then from Arabic into his own philosophical analysis. The Arabic versions of Aristotle studied in this thesis did not simply replicate the Greek. They created a new field of use, offering cues, emphases, and connotations that predisposed Rushd toward a traditional reading of prime matter.

Seen in this light, translation is not a neutral transmission but a distinct practice with its own limits. Meaning moves from writer to translator and only then to reader. Translation therefore becomes its own new *Sprachspiel*, and ibn Rushd's case shows how profoundly such a game can redirect philosophical thinking.

[53] Recent studies have explored connections between prime matter and modern physics, emphasising the value of understanding the concept historically. Oderberg (2022, pp. 534–550), for instance, discusses whether prime matter can be identified with the modern scientific concept of energy. Simpson (forthcoming) argues that the Thomist account of prime matter closely resembles the 'primitive ontology' in quantum mechanics.

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APPENDIX

Chapter I Physics

Text 1.1] Physics 191a24–32

Greek Text	English Translation
Ὅτι δὲ μοναχῶς οὕτω λύεται καὶ ἡ τῶν ἀρχαίων ἀπορία, λέγωμεν μετὰ ταῦτα. ζητοῦντες γὰρ οἱ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν πρῶτοι τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ τὴν φύσιν τὴν τῶν ὄντων ἐξετράπησαν οἷον ὁδόν τινα ἄλλην ἀπωσθέντες ὑπὸ ἀπειρίας, καί φασιν οὔτε γίνεσθαι τῶν ὄντων οὐδὲν οὔτε φθείρεσθαι, διὰ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον μὲν εἶναι γίγνεσθαι τὸ γιγνόμενον ἢ ἐξ ὄντος ἢ ἐκ μὴ ὄντος, ἐκ δὲ τούτων ἀμφοτέρων ἀδύνατον εἶναι· οὔτε γὰρ τὸ ὂν γίνεσθαι (εἶναι γὰρ ἤδη) ἔκ τε μὴ ὄντος οὐδὲν ἂν γενέσθαι· ὑποκεῖσθαι γάρ τι δεῖ[54].	*After these things, let us say that the aporia of the ancients can only be solved this way. For the first in philosophy looking for the truth and the nature of beings, were diverted as if onto some other path being driven by ignorance, and they said that none of the beings come to be or perish, because of the fact that it is necessary that what comes to be either comes from what is or what is not, but [to come] from both of these is impossible. For what is does not come to be (since it already is), and from what is not, nothing comes to be. Therefore, something must underlie.*

Arabic Translation (ed. Badawī, pp. 66 – 67)	English Translation
وها نحن أولاء، نشرع في بيان أن الشك الذي وقع فيه المتقدمون، وما وقعنا فيه نحن، يُحلّ على هذا النحو وحده فأول من درسوا العلم قد ضلوا سبيل البحث عن الحق وعن طبيعة الأشياء لعدم خبرتهم ، فاندفعوا في طريق آخر. فهم يقولون إنه لاشيء من الموجودات تكون < أو فسد ، لأن ما تكون تكون إما عن موجود أو > عن غير موجود ، وليس يمكن أن يكون شيء ولا عن واحد من هذين جميعاً. وذلك أن الموجود لا يكون (وذلك أن الموجود حاصل على الوجود) وعما ليس بموجود ليس يكون شيء من الأشياء (وذلك أنه يحتاج فى التكون إلى شيء يكون موضوعاً).	*And firstly, we begin to explain that the doubt into which the ancients fell – and into which we ourselves have fallen – is solved only in this way. For the first who studied the science strayed from the path of inquiry into the truth and into the nature of things because of their lack of experience, and they were driven onto another road. They say that none of the beings come to be or perish, because whatever comes to be comes either from a being or from a non-being, and it is not possible that it comes from either of these. For a being does not come to be (since being came into existence), and from what is not being nothing can come to be (for in becoming there must be some subject).* *And when they examined what follows necessarily from this position, they said that*

[54] I emend δεῖν to δεῖ, following MSS ΠPS[1]T.

ولما فتشوا ما يلزم هذا الوضع ويتصل به قالوا إنه ليس الأشياء كثيرا، بل إنما هي الموجود وحده. فأولئك إنما اعتقدوا هذا الرأي من قبل ما ذكرناه.	*things are not many, but that there is only being itself. These men, therefore, held this opinion for the reason we have mentioned.*

Commentary Rushd (ed. Iunta, 41I–K)	English Translation
Cum declaravit quot sunt principia, et quae eorum sunt per se, et quae per accidens, et quae actu, et quae potentia, incepit declarare quod ex istis rebus dissolvetur quaestio quam quaerebant antiqui naturales, ita quod coegit eos negare principia et generationem et transmutationem et multitudinem. Et dixit: *Ex istis igitur etc.*, id est, ex istis igitur quae diximus potest quis scire numerum et naturam eorum. Deinde dixit: *Et declarandum est post*, id est quia sermo demonstrativus innatus est solvere omnes quaestiones accedentes in re. Et hoc significat etiam quod ipse invenit hanc causam, scilicet primam materiam et istum numerum principiorum. Et intendebat per 'antiquos' Parmenidem et Melissum.	*When he had explained how many principles there are, and which of them exist per se and which by accident, which in actuality and which in potentiality, he began to show that from these affairs the question which the ancient natural [philosophers] sought to resolve, is dissolved, namely [the question] that forced them to deny principles, generation, change, and multiplicity. And he said:* From these, therefore, etc., *that is, from these [points] which we have mentioned, one can know the number and nature of these. Then he said:* And it must be explained later*, that is, because demonstrative discussion has the nature to solve all questions that arise in a matter. And this also shows that he himself discovered this cause, namely prime matter and this number of principles. And by 'the ancients' he meant Parmenides and Melissus.*

Text 1.2] Physics 193b20–23

Greek Text	English Translation
ἡ ἄρα μορφὴ φύσις. ἡ δέ μορφὴ καὶ ἡ φύσις διχῶς λέγεται· καὶ γὰρ ἡ στέρησις εἶδός πώς ἐστιν. εἰ δ' ἐστὶν ἡ στέρησις καὶ ἐναντίον τι περὶ τὴν ἁπλῆν γένεσιν ἢ μὴ ἔστιν, ὕστερον ἐπισκεπτέον.	*The form, then, is nature. But 'form' and 'nature' can be spoken of in two ways: For privation is a kind of form. Whether privation is also some kind of contrary in simple generation or not, is something that must be examined at a later time.*

Arabic Translation (ed. Badawī, pp. 89–90)	English Translation
(الخلقة) و (الطبيعة) تقال على ضربين : فإن العدم أيضاً هو على وجه من الوجوه صورة . فأما هل في التكون المطلق العدم وشيء ما هو ضد ، أوليس فيه فنحن باحثون عن ذلك بأخَرَة .	*The terms 'creation' and 'nature' are said in two ways. For privation, too, is in a certain respect a kind of form. Now, whether in absolute coming-to-be there is privation and something that is its contrary, or whether this is not the case, we will investigate later.*

Commentary Rushd (ed. Iunta, 53G)	English Translation
Et forte intendit, quod forma dicitur duobus modis, de habitu et privatione existente in prima materia. Ista enim privatio quomodo non est privatio simplex, immo est sicut forma materiae. Et quia hoc manifestum est in contrariis, quae sunt in qualitate, et non est manifestum, quomodo est de generatione in substantia, scilicet utrum cum privatione formae substantialis coniungatur contrarium aut non, dixit: *Utrum autem in generatione etc*., id est utrum autem in generatione simplici inveniatur coniunctum cum privatione aliquod contrarium, ita quod dicatur hoc nomen 'forma' etiam de isto contrario, cui coniungitur ista privatio, aut de privatione coniuncta cum hoc contrario, secundum quod est coniuncta aut non, perscrutandum est post, id est in libro De generatione et corruptione. Illic enim declarabit, quod privatio, quae est in prima materia, non denudatur a primis contrariis, quae sunt quattuor qualitates, et quod ista contraria sunt prima omnium quae generantur et corrumpuntur.	*And perhaps he intends that form is said in two ways: of disposition and of privation existing in prime matter. For this privation is not a simple privation, but it is rather like a form of matter. And because this is clear in contraries that belong to quality, but not clear how it is in the generation of substance, namely whether with the privation of substantial form a contrary is joined or not, he said:* but whether in generation, etc*., that is, whether in simple generation some contrary is found joined with privation, so that the name 'form' is said also of this contrary with which this privation is joined, or of the privation joined with this contrary, in accordance with that it is joined, or not, this must be investigated later, namely in the book On Generation and Corruption For there he will show that the privation which exists in prime matter is not stripped away from the primary contraries which are the four qualities and that these contraries are the first of all things that are generated and corrupted.*

Text 1.3] Physics 193b4–8

Greek Text	English Translation
ὥστε ἄλλον τρόπον ἡ φύσις ἂν εἴη τῶν ἐχόντων ἐν αὑτοῖς κινήσεως ἀρχὴν ἡ μορφὴ καὶ τὸ εἶδος, οὐ χωριστὸν ὂν ἀλλ᾽ ἢ κατὰ τὸν λόγον. (τὸ δ᾽ ἐκ τούτων φύσις μὲν οὐκ ἔστι, φύσει δέ, οἷον ἄνθρωπος.) καὶ μᾶλλον αὕτη φύσις τῆς ὕλης· ἕκαστον γὰρ τότε λέγεται ὅταν ἐντελεχείᾳ ᾖ μᾶλλον ἢ ὅταν δυνάμει.	*Therefore, in another way, the nature of things that have motion within is the shape and form, not something separable except conceptually. For what is composed of these is not nature, but in nature, such as a man. And this is more truly nature than matter. For each thing is said to be when it is in actuality rather than in potentiality.*

Commentary Rushd (ed. Iunta 52F)	English Translation
Secundum igitur hoc nomen 'natura', quod dicitur de forma, dicitur alio modo ab eo, secundum quem dicitur de materia. Deinde dixit: *Et ista forma etc.*, id est non separatur a materia in esse, ita quod possit esse sine materia, sed est separata a materia secundum diffinitionem tantum. Materia autem differt a forma, sed numquam denudatur a forma. Immo, cum separatur a forma, induit aliam, quoniam si denudaretur ab omnibus formis, scilicet prima materia, tunc quod non est in actu esset in actu. Et cum notificavit, quod natura dicitur de forma, incepit etiam declarare formam esse digniorem hoc quam materiam. Et dixit: *Illa autem etc.*, id est forma. Deinde induxit rationem super hoc. Et dixit: *Omne enim etc.*, id est omne enim non dicitur esse simpliciter nisi cum fuerit in sua ultima perfectione, quod est habere formam; et tunc esse est dignius ei quam cum fuerit in potentia.	*Therefore, according to this name 'nature', which is said of form, is spoken of in a another way from this, according to which it is said of matter. Then he said*: And this is form etc.*, that is, it is not separated from matter in being, in such a way that it could exist without matter, but it is separated from matter only according to definition. Matter, however, differs from form, but it is never stripped of form. Indeed, when it is separated from one form, it takes on another, because if it were stripped of all forms, as prime matter is, then that which is not in actuality would be in actuality. And when he made clear that nature is said of form, he also began to explain that form is more worthy in this respect than matter. And he said*: That one however etc.*, that is, form. Then he introduced a reason for this, and said:* For everything etc.*, that is, for everything is not said to be 'simply' unless it became its ultimate perfection, which is to have form; and then, being is more worthy of it than when it exists in potentiality.*

Text 1.4] Physics 226a24–26

Greek Text	English Translation
Ἐπεὶ δὲ οὔτε οὐσίας οὔτε τοῦ πρός τι οὔτε τοῦ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν, λείπεται κατὰ τὸ ποιὸν καὶ τὸ ποσὸν καὶ τὸ ποὺ κίνησιν εἶναι μόνον· ἐν ἑκάστῳ γάρ ἐστι τούτων ἐναντίωσις.	*Since motion does not belong to substance nor to relation nor to acting and being acted upon, it remains that it belongs only to quality, quantity and locality. For in each of these there is contrast.*

Commentary Rushd (ed. Iunta 215F–H)	English Translation
Cum posuit quod motus invenitur in tribus praedicamentis tantum, incepit destruere ipsum esse in aliquo ceterorum, et incepit a substantia etc. Et dixit: *In substantia vero etc*., id est, in substantia vero non est motus, quoniam omnis motus est de contrario ad contrarium. Sed substantia non est contraria substantiae, ut dictum est in Praedicamentis. Et intendit hic per contraria: contraria mediata quorum utrumque est forma et habitus, et habent media. Sed quaeritur hic quomodo dixit in libro Peri Geneos quod ignis est contrarius aquae et terra aeri. Et Alexander dicit ad hoc quod hoc quod dixit in libro Praedicamentorum est de substantiis quae sunt compositae, id est ex forma et materia. Et in libro De Generatione loquitur de simplicibus, scilicet de formis tantum, quae sunt in potentia in prima materia. Et ista solutio non sufficit in hoc quod est dictum hic, quoniam hoc quod est dictum hic, quod in substantia non est transmutatio quia non habet contrarium, est sermo ponentis quod in substantia non est contrarietas secundum formam aut subiectum. Et si in substantia esset contrarietas secundum formam, non secundum subiectum, tunc sermo Aristotelis non esset verus in hoc loco. Et opinandum est quod substantiae simplices sunt contrariae secundum suas qualitates, et propriae qualitates in eis non sunt substantiae.	*Since he posed that motion is found only in three categories, he began to deny that it exists in any of the other ones, and began with substance, etc. And he said:* In substance, however, etc*., that is, in substance, indeed, there is no motion, because every motion is from contrary to contrary. But substance is not contrary to substance, as was stated in the Categories. Here he means by contraries: those intermediated contraries of which each is a form and state and which possess intermediates. Yet here one questions how he said in the book On Generation that fire is contrary to water and earth to air. Alexander responds to this [by saying] that what [Aristotle] said in the Categories is about substances that are composite, that is, [composed] of form and matter. In On Generation he speaks of the simple ones, namely forms only, which exist potentially in prime matter. But this solution does not suffice for what is said here, because that what is said here, that there is no change in substance, since it has no contrary, is the statement of someone posing that there is no contrariety in substance, whether in respect of form or of subject. And if in substance there were contrariety according to form, not to subject, then the statement of Aristotle would not be true in this place. It should be the opinion that simple substances are contrary according to their qualities, and that their proper qualities are not themselves substances.*

Text 1.5] Physics 196b10–16

Greek Text	English Translation
Πρῶτον μὲν οὖν, ἐπειδὴ ὁρῶμεν τὰ μὲν ἀεὶ ὡσαύτως γινόμενα τὰ δὲ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολύ, φανερὸν ὅτι οὐδετέρου τούτων αἰτία ἡ τύχη λέγεται οὐδὲ τὸ ἀπὸ τύχης, οὔτε τοῦ ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ ἀεὶ οὔτε τοῦ ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολύ. ἀλλ᾽ ἐπειδὴ ἔστιν ἃ γίγνεται καὶ παρὰ ταῦτα, καὶ ταῦτα πάντες φασὶν εἶναι ἀπὸ τύχης, φανερὸν ὅτι ἔστι τι ἡ τύχη καὶ τὸ αὐτόματον· τά τε γὰρ τοιαῦτα ἀπὸ τύχης καὶ τὰ ἀπὸ τύχης τοιαῦτα ὄντα ἴσμεν.	*First, then, since we see that some things always come to be in the same way, and other things for the most part, it is evident that chance and what happens by chance are not said to be a cause of these things: not of what happens necessarily nor always nor usually. But since there are also things which happen apart from these, and everyone says that these things happen by chance, it is clear that chance and accident exist. For we know that such things happen by chance and that things by chance are of such a kind.*

Commentary Rushd (ed. Iunta 66C–D)	English Translation
Et posuit, quod neuter istorum duorum modorum fit casu. Et hoc manifestum est per se, quoniam cum posuerimus, quod non omnia sunt necessaria, sequitur, ut quaedam sint possibilia. Et possibile dividitur in illud, quod est possibile in maiori parte, et in illud, quod non est possibile in maiori parte. (...) Si igitur casus ex se sit aliquid, necesse est, ut sit in rebus quae non sunt possibiles in maiori parte. (...) Sed posteriores Peripatetici, ut narravit Avicenna, dicunt, quod casus invenitur in eis, quae sunt possibilia in minori parte, non in eis, quae sunt aequaliter. Et haec est sententia Themistii. Avicenna autem dicit, quod casus est in utroque (...). Dicamus igitur, quod prima materia est parata ad recipiendum duo contraria aequaliter. Et ideo receptio utriusque contrariorum est ei naturalis. (...) Et cum dicimus, quod potentia ad esse in prima materia est aequalis potentiae ad non esse, intendimus, quod duo contraria inveniuntur in ea in temporibus aequalibus oppositis (...). Apparet igitur ex hoc, quod contingens aequaliter non invenitur in potentiis agentibus per se, sed in potentiis passivis, quarum praeparatio ad receptionem duorum contrariorum est aequalis (...).	*He poses that neither of the two kinds of modes come to be by chance. This is evident in itself, for when we pose that not all things are necessary, it follows that some are possible. The possible is divided into that which is possible for the most part, and that which is not possible for the most part. (...) If chance, therefore, is something [real] in itself, it is necessary that it exists in cases which are not possible for the most part. (...) The later Peripatetics, as Avicenna reports, say that chance is found in those things which are possible for the smaller part, not in those that are equally possible. this is the opinion of Themistius. Avicenna, however, says that chance is found in both kinds, (...). Let us therefore say that prime matter is prepared to receive both contraries equally, and that this twofold receptivity is natural to it. (...) And when we say that the potentiality for being in prime matter is equal to the potentiality for non-being, we mean that both contraries are found in it at equally opposite times (...). It is clear from this that what is equally contingent is not found in active powers per se, but in passive powers whose disposition for receiving the two contraries is equal. (...)*

Chapter II De Caelo

Text 2.1] De Caelo 306b11–20

Greek Text	English Translation
ἔπειτα φαίνεται πάντα μὲν τὰ ἁπλᾶ σώματα σχηματιζόμενα τῷ περιέχοντι τόπῳ, μάλιστα δὲ τὸ ὕδωρ καὶ ὁ ἀήρ. Διαμένειν μὲν οὖν τὸ τοῦ στοιχείου σχῆμα ἀδύνατον· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἥπτετο πανταχῇ τοῦ περιέχοντος τὸ ὅλον. ἀλλὰ μὴν εἰ μεταρρυθμισθήσεται, οὐκέτι ἔσται ὕδωρ, εἴπερ τῷ σχήματι διέφερεν. ὥστε φανερὸν ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὡρισμένα τὰ σχήματα αὐτῶν. ἀλλ᾽ ἔοικεν ἡ φύσις αὐτὴ τοῦτο σημαίνειν ἡμῖν, ὃ καὶ κατὰ λόγον ἐστίν· ὥσπερ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀειδὲς καὶ ἄμορφον δεῖ τὸ ὑποκείμενον εἶναι· μάλιστα γὰρ ἂν οὕτω δύναιτο ῥυθμίζεσθαι, καθάπερ ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ γέγραπται, τὸ πανδεχές. Οὕτω καὶ τὰ στοιχεῖα δεῖ νομίζειν ὥσπερ ὕλην εἶναι τοῖς συνθέτοις· διὸ καὶ δύναται μεταβάλλειν εἰς ἄλληλα χωριζομένων τῶν κατὰ πάθη διαφορῶν.	*Next, it appears that all the simple bodies take their shape from the surrounding place, especially water and air. Thus, it is impossible for the shape of the elements to remain, for then the whole would not touch the containing place everywhere. But if it were reshaped, it would no longer be water, if indeed it differed in its shape. So it is clear that their shapes are not bound. Rather, nature itself seems to indicate this to us, and this is according to reason: for just as in other cases, the underlying subject must be shapeless and formless; for in this way it is most able to take on shape, as it is written in the Timaeus, the 'all-receptive.' Thus also the elements must be thought of as matter for composites, and therefore they can be transformed into one another when their qualitative differences are separated.*

Arabic Translation (ed. Badawī, p. 350)	English Translation
ونقول أيضاً إنا قد نرى الأجرام كلها البسيطة تتشكل على نحو شكل الموضع المحيط بها، ولاسيما الماء والهواء. فإن كان هذا هكذا، لم يكن ليبقى شكل الاسطقس على حاله، وذلك أنه لو لم يكن كذلك لم يكن يلمس بكليته الموضع المحيط به من جميع نواحيه. فإن لمسه وصار على شكله لم يبق على حاله، فلا يكون ماء ألبتة إن كان الماء هو بالحال شكله. فقد استبان الآن وصح أنه ليس للاسطقات أشكال محدودة، لكن طبيعتها دالة على أنه ليس لها أشكال ذاتية. وكذلك ينبغى أن يكون – وذلك أن الموضع الحامل لسائر الأشياء لا صورة له ولا شكل، لكنها تستطيع أن نتصور كما يقول هؤلاء أيضاً في الهيولى القابلة لجميع الأشياء، كذلك ينبغى أن نفهم الاسطقات أيضاً كهيولى الأجرام المركبة الواقعة تحت الحواس، فكذلك يمكن أن تستحيل الاسطقات بعضها إلى بعض إذا ما فارقتها كيفياتها المختلفة.	*We also say: we indeed see that all the simple bodies take on the shape of the place that surrounds them, especially water and air. If this is the case, then the shape of the element does not remain in its state. For if it were not so, it would not, with its entirety, touch the surrounding place on all sides. But if it touches it and takes on its shape, then it does not remain in its own state, nor would it be water at all, if water were nothing other than its shape. Thus, it has become clear now and has been proven to be correct that the elements do not have fixed shapes, but rather their nature indicates that they have no intrinsic shapes. And this is how it ought to be: for the place, bearer of all things, has no form and no shape. Yet we can conceive it, just as those also say regarding matter, which is receptive of all things. In the same way we should understand the elements also, as being like the matter of composite bodies perceptible to the senses, and*

for this reason the elements can be transformed into one another, whenever their different qualities depart from them.

Commentary Rushd (ed. Carmody & Arnzen, pp.633–4)	English Translation
Et cum hoc quod contingit in elementis, similiter contingit in prima materia, et magis in prima materia. Demonstravit hoc: ipsi enim concedunt quod materia non habet formam aut figuram, et dixit: *Sicut isti etiam dicunt de materia recipiente omnia,* id est, contingit eis dicere elementa non habere figuram, quia dicunt primam materiam non habere formam substantialem.	*And besides this, what happens in the elements likewise happens in prime matter, and even more in prime matter. He demonstrated this: for they themselves confirm that matter has no form or figure. And he said*: just as those also say concerning the matter that receives all things*, that is, it follows for them to say that the elements do not have a figure, because they say that prime matter does not have a substantial form.*
Deinde dedit similitudinem in hac intentione, et dixit: *Sic est intelligendum de elementis* etc., id est, et necesse est ut eandem dispositionem habeant, cum utrumque sit materia. Et in hoc tantum differunt, quoniam haec quidem sunt materia corporum sensibilium, id est compositorum; haec autem est materia corporum simplicium primo, secundo vero corporum compositorum mediantibus istis elementis.	*Then he gave an analogy in this intention, and said*: thus, it must be understood of the elements etc*, that is, it is necessary that they have the same disposition, since both are matter. And they differ only in this, since these [the elements] are the matter of sensible bodies, that is, of composites; while that [prime matter] is the matter of simple bodies first of all, and secondarily of composite bodies through the mediation of these elements.*
Et quaerendum est quare igitur non ponitis haec elementa habere figuras, et ponitis ea habere formas; et iam dixistis quod prima materia non est receptibilis formarum nisi in quantum caret forma omnino. Et dissolutio est quia non est necessarium in receptibili nisi ut non habeat formam quam recipit, non ut non habeat formam omnino: quia igitur prima materia est receptibilis omnium formarum, non debet habere aliam formam omnino; elementa vero, quia non sunt receptibilia omnium formarum, cum non recipiant se, non debent denudari a suis formis apud receptionem, sed est necessarium tantum ut denudentur a formis quas recipiunt. Et ideo omnis materia habens formam est receptibilis quarundam formarum tantum, et propter hoc istae materiae propriae habent formas quas recipiunt; prima autem materia est universalis, cum nullam formam habeat omnino.	*And the question must be asked why then do you not posit that these elements have figures, but you do posit that they have forms? For you have already said that prime matter is not receptive of forms except insofar as it is entirely devoid of form. The solution is that it is not necessary for the recipient that it should not have any form completely, except that it does not have the form which is receives. Therefore, since prime matter is receptive of all forms, it must lack every form entirely. But the elements, since they are not receptive of all forms, because they do not receive themselves, ought not to be stripped of their own forms upon reception, but is only necessary that they are stripped of those forms which they do receive. And therefore, every matter that has a form is receptive of only certain forms, and for this reason these proper matters have the forms which they receive; whereas prime matter is universal, since it has no form at all.*

Text 2.2] De Caelo 312a25–b2

Greek Text	English Translation
Τὸ μὲν οὖν ἔχον τοιαύτην ὕλην κοῦφον καὶ ἀεὶ ἄνω, τὸ δὲ τὴν ἐναντίαν βαρὺ καὶ ἀεὶ κάτω· τὸ δ᾽ ἑτέρας μὲν τούτων, ἐχούσας δ᾽ οὕτω πρὸς ἀλλήλας ὡς αὗται ἁπλῶς, καὶ ἄνω καὶ κάτω [φερομένας]. Διὸ ἀὴρ καὶ ὕδωρ ἔχουσι καὶ κουφότητα καὶ βάρος ἑκάτερον, καὶ ὕδωρ μὲν πλὴν γῆς πᾶσιν ὑφίσταται, ἀὴρ δὲ πλὴν πυρὸς πᾶσιν ἐπιπολάζει. ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ἐστὶν ἓν μόνον ὃ πᾶσιν ἐπιπολάζει καὶ ἓν ὃ πᾶσιν ὑφίσταται, ἀνάγκη δύο ἄλλα εἶναι ἃ καὶ ὑφίσταταί τινι καὶ ἐπιπολάζει τινί. Ὥστε ἀνάγκη καὶ τὰς ὕλας τοσαύτας εἶναι ὅσαπερ ταῦτα, τέτταρας, οὕτω δὲ τέτταρας ὡς μίαν μὲν ἁπάντων τὴν κοινήν, ἄλλως τε καὶ εἰ γίγνονται ἐξ ἀλλήλων, ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶναι ἕτερον.	*Thus one body has a light matter and always rises upwards, whereas the other has the opposite sort of matter and always sinks beneath. But what has a matter other than these, having such a relation to one another as those have to one another simply, is carried both upwards and downwards. Therefore air and water have lightness and heaviness, and water is placed under all except earth, and air floats over all except fire. Since there is only one body which floats over everything, and another which is placed under everything, there must exist two others which are both placed beneath something and float over something else. It is necessary that these kinds of matter are as much as these, namely four, but four in such a way that one is common to all, especially since they come to be from each other, although their being is different.*

Arabic Translation (ed. Badawī p.381)	English Translation
وذلك أن الماء يرسب تحت الأجرام، إلا ما كان من الأرض وحدها؛ والهواء يطفو على الأجرام كلها إلا ما كان من النار وحدها. فترجع فنقول: إذا كان جرم واحد فقط يطفو على الأجرام كلها، وكان جرم واحد تحت الأجرام كلها، كان من الاضطرار أن يكون شيئان آخران يطفوان على جرم من الأجرام، ويرسبان تحت جرم من الأجرام. فإن كان هذا على هذا، فمن الاضطرار أن يكون عدد العناصر أربعة. ولست أعني العنصر الأول، فإنه واحد فقط، فلذلك صار كون هذه العناصر بعضها من بعض. وهي وإن كان كون بعضها من بعض وآنيتها ضد كونها، أقول: إنه وإن كان الطرفان اثنين، فليس بممتنع أن يكون ما بينهما جرماً واحداً أو كثيراً، كما لا يمتنع أن يكون في الألوان، فإنه قد يوجد في وسط الطرفين أنواع كثيرة من الألوان.	*That is because water sinks beneath the bodies, except only earth, and air floats above all bodies, except only fire. So, we say in return: if there is only one body that floats above all bodies, and one body that sinks beneath all bodies, then it is necessary that there be two other bodies which float above some bodies and sink beneath others. If this is the case, then it is necessary that the number of elements be four. And I do not mean the First Element, for that is only one; therefore, it is through it that the coming-to-be of these elements from one another occurs. And although they are generated from one another, their individual existence is opposed to their generation. I say: even if the extremes are two, it is not impossible that what lies between them be one body or many bodies, just as it is not impossible in the case of colours, for between two extremes there can be many kinds of colours.*

Commentary Rushd (ed. Carmody & Arnzen, pp. 734–735)	English Translation
Deinde dixit: *Quapropter necesse est ut elementa sint quatuor,* id est, cum ad minus sint loca quatuor, necesse est ut corpora sint quatuor. Et dixit: *Non dico primum elementum*, quoniam hoc nomen elementum aliquando dicitur de his corporibus quatuor, aliquando de prima materia. Deinde dixit: *Et ideo generatio istorum elementorum fit ex invicem*, id est et quia materia eorum est una, fuit possibile ut haec elementa generarentur ex invicem: si enim haberent materias diversas, non reciperent suas formas reciproce, quia materiae diversae non recipiunt nisi formas diversas. Quia enim habent unam materiam, ideo possunt generari ex invicem; et quia videmus ea generari ex invicem, scimus ea habere unicam materiam.	*Then he said*: therefore, it is necessary that the elements be four*, that is, since there are at least four places, it is necessary that there be four bodies. And he said*: I do not mean the first element*, for this name 'element' is sometimes applied to these four bodies, sometimes to prime matter. Then he said:* And therefore, the generation of these elements comes about from one another, *that is, because their matter is one, it was possible for these elements to be generated from one another. For if they had different matters, they would not receive one another's forms reciprocally, since different matters do not receive except for different forms. But because they have one matter, therefore they can be generated from one another; and since we see them generated from one another, we know that they have one and the same matter.*

Text 2.3] De Caelo 288b22–30

Greek Text	English Translation
Ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἄλογον ἄπειρον χρόνον ἀδύνατον εἶναι τὸ κινοῦν, καὶ πάλιν ἄλλον ἄπειρον δυνατόν· οὐθὲν γὰρ φαίνεται ὂν ἄπειρον χρόνον παρὰ φύσιν (ἡ δ᾽ ἀδυναμία παρὰ φύσιν), οὐδὲ τὸν ἴσον χρόνον παρὰ φύσιν καὶ κατὰ φύσιν, οὐδ᾽ ὅλως δυνατὸν καὶ ἀδύνατον· ἀνάγκη δ᾽, εἰ ἀνίησιν ἡ κίνησις, ἄπειρον ἀνιέναι χρόνον. ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδ᾽ ἐπιτείνειν ἀεὶ ἢ πάλιν ἀνίενται δυνατόν· ἄπειρος γὰρ ἂν εἴη καὶ ἀόριστος ἡ κίνησις, ἅπασαν δέ φαμεν ἔκ τινος εἴς τι εἶναι καὶ ὡρισμένην.	*Furthermore, it is unreasonable that a mover is unable [to move] for an infinite time, and yet also be capable of it. For nothing seems to be unnatural for an infinite time (and inability is contrary to nature), nor can something be unnatural and natural for an equal time, nor – in general – be both capable and incapable. But it is necessary that, if motion ceases, it ceases for an infinite time. But indeed, it is not possible that motion is always accelerating or again slowing down. For the motion would then be infinite and indefinite, but we say that all [motion] is from something to something and is definite.*

Commentary Rushd (ed. Carmody & Arnzen, p. 343)	English Translation
Er ideo opinandum est quod potentie moventium separabilium a materia sunt finite uno modo et infinite alio modo; et ex hoc apparet quod post dicet Aristoteles, quoniam si ceteri orbes habuissent ex multitudine stellarum quod habet orbis stellatus, tunc motor eorum non posset movere eos in velocitate quam modo habent; et similiter esset si orbis esset maior quam sit. Et ideo credendum est quod potentie moventium sunt terminate proportionis ad corpora mota, et quod infinitas non invenitur in eis nisi propter eternitatem, causa enim abscisionis continuitatis esse et eius eternitatis est materia; cum ergo motor et res mota abscinduntur a prima materia, non abscindetur suum esse neque suum opus, quod est movere et moveri.	*Therefore it must be held that the powers of the movers separate from matter are finite in one respect and infinite in another; and from this it becomes clear what Aristotle will later say, that if the other spheres had the multitude of stars that the starry sphere has, then their mover could not move them with the velocity, which they now have; and the same would count if the sphere were larger than it is. And therefore it must be believed that the powers of the movers are finite in proportion to the bodies moved, and that their infinity is not found except due to eternity, for the cause of the interruption of continuity of being and of its eternity is matter; and therefore, when the mover and the thing moved are separated from prime matter, their being and their action, which is to move and to be moved, are not separated.*

Text 2.4] De Caelo 301a16–20

Greek Text	English Translation
Διὸ καὶ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς παραλείπει τὴν ἐπὶ τῆς φιλότητος· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἠδύνατο συστῆσαι τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐκ κεχωρισμένων μὲν κατασκευάζων, σύγκρισιν δὲ ποιῶν διὰ τὴν φιλότητα· ἐκ διακεκριμένων γὰρ συνέστηκεν ὁ κόσμος τῶν στοιχείων, ὥστ᾽ ἀναγκαῖον γίνεσθαι ἐξ ἑνὸς καὶ συγκεκριμένου.	*Therefore, Empedocles also passes over Love. For he could not possibly construct the heaven by building it from things that are separated, while producing their combination through Love. For the cosmos is composed from elements that are already distinct, so it is necessary that its formation from a unity and combination.*

Commentary Rushd (ed. Carmody & Arnzen, p. 343)	English Translation
Et etiam si confessi fuerimus ei quod intelligendum est ex non ordinatione privationem ordinationis, ut dixit Themistius, impossibile est ut intelligatur ex eo quod est non ordinatum prima materia, ut isti dicunt secundum opinionem Platonis, neque etiam secundum nostram opinionem: non enim esset possibile ut intelligeretur secundum nostram opinionem nisi sermo esset ex quatuor elementis, non de omnibus primis partibus mundi: corpus enim celeste non habet materiam cum non habeat contrarium. Plato autem intendebat per hec omnia elementa ex quibus torus mundus fuit generatus, non quedam; et etiam Plato numquam percepit primam materiam.	*And even if we were to confess to him that the privation of order should be understood from 'non-order', as Themistius said, it is impossible that it is understood from this, that what is 'not ordered' is prime matter, as those people say according to the opinion of Plato, nor even according to our opinion: for it would not be possible that is it understood according to our opinion unless the discussion were about the four elements, not about all the primary parts of the world: for a celestial body does not have matter, since it has no contrary. Plato, however, intended by these [disordered things] all the elements from which the whole world was generated, not some of them; and indeed, Plato never perceived prime matter.*

Chapter III Metaphysics

Text 3.1] Metaph. Δ.4, 1014b14–16

Greek Text	English Translation
ἁπάντων δὲ κοινὸν τὸ εἶναι στοιχεῖον ἑκάστου τὸ πρῶτον ἐνυπάρχον ἑκάστῳ.	*And common to all is the fact that the element of each thing is that which is primarily inherent in each thing.*

Arabic Translation (Bouyges, p. 498, 14–16)	English Translation
قال أرسطو : (...) والأسطقس هو المشترك لجميع الأشياء الذي هو أول كل شيء من الأشياء وهو في كل واحد من الأشياء أول .	*Aristotle said:* *(...)* *And the element is what is common to all things, that which is first of everything of [all] the things, and which is in every single thing primary.*

Commentary Rushd (Bouyges, p. 505, 4–11)	English Translation
قال والاسطقس هو المشترك لجميع الأشياء الذي هو أول كل شيء من الأشياء وهو في كل واحد من الأشياء أول يريد واذا كان حد الاسطقس هو الحد الأول الذي رسمناه به فبين ان الاسطقس الحقيقي هو المشترك لجميع المركبات الذي هو أول ما تركبت منه جميع الأشياء وهو موجود في كل واحد منها واليه تنحل جميع الأشياء وهذا الاسطقس يجب ان يكون هو السبب في سائر الاسطقسات وهذا الذي ذكره هو المادة الأولى .	*He said that the element is what is common to all things, the thing which is the first of everything of [all] things and which is in every single thing primary. By this, he means that if the definition of an element is the first definition we described, it is clear that the true element is what is common to all compounds, which is the first thing from which all things are composed, exists in each of them, and into which all things resolve. This element must be the cause of all other elements, and this is what he mentioned as the primary matter.*

Text 3.2] Metaph. Δ.4, 1015a9–12

Greek Text	English Translation
φύσις δὲ ἥ τε πρώτη ὕλη (καὶ αὕτη διχῶς), ἢ ἡ πρὸς αὐτὸ πρώτη ἢ ἡ ὅλως πρώτη, οἷον τῶν χαλκῶν ἔργων πρὸς αὐτὰ μὲν πρῶτος ὁ χαλκός, ὅλως δ' ἴσως ὕδωρ, εἰ πάντα τὰ τηκτὰ ὕδωρ), καὶ τὸ εἶδος καὶ ἡ οὐσία· τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς γενέσεως.	*And nature is the prime matter (and this is in two ways), either it is prime in relation to something, or prime in general, like how – in the case of bronze objects – bronze is primary 'in relation to something', whereas in general it is, perhaps, water, if all things that can be melted are water, but also form or substance: and this is the end of becoming.*

Arabic Translation (Bouyges p. 507, 5–9)	English Translation
وتقال طبيعة الهيولى الأولى وهذه تقال على نوعين فانها تقال اولا بالاضافة الى شيء واولا بالحقيقة مثل الاشياء المصنوعة من نحاس فان النحاس اذا اضيف الى هذه هو اول وخليق ان يقال اول بالحقيقة . للماء ان كان جميع الذائبة ماء وتقال طبيعة الصورة والجوهر وهذا هو نهاية التكون .	*And it is said that the nature of matter is primary, and this is said in two ways: it is said [to be] 'primary' in relation to something, and primary 'truly'. For example, the things made of copper. For when copper is added to this, it is primary. And as for water, it is truly more deserving of being called 'primary' , if all that is meltable is water; and nature is said to be form and substance, and this is the end of becoming.*

Commentary Rushd (Bouyges, p. 513, 10–17; p.514, 1–3)	English Translation
وتقال طبيعة الهيولى الأولى وهذه تقال على نوعين فانها تقال اولا بالاضافة الى شيء واولى بالحقيقة (يريد) والطبيعة تقال على الهيولي والهيولى على نوعين احدهما الهيولى الأولى المشتركة للجميع والثاني الهيولى الخاصة بموجود موجود . ثم اتى بمثال ذلك فقال مثل الاشياء المصنوعة من النحاس فان النحاس اذا اضيف الى هذه هو اول ، وخليق ان يقال اول بالحقيقة للماء ان كان جميع الذائبة ماء . (يريد) مثال الهيولى الأولى القريبة التي يقال فيها انها اولى بالاضافة الى جنس ما او نوع ما النحاس لجميع ما يصنع منه ومثال الهيولى التي هي أولى بالحقيقة للأشياء التي تصنع من	*And it is said that the nature of prime matter is spoken of in two ways: primary, in relation to something, and primary as is truly intended. Nature is predicated of matter, and matter is of two types: one is the prime matter common to all things, and the other is the specific matter to an existing being. To illustrate this, he gave the example of things made of copper, because when copper is added to these [i.e. things made of copper] it is primary, and deserving of being called primary truly is water, if all that is meltable is water. An example of the proximate*

prime matter, which is said to be primary in relation to a genus or a species, is copper for all the things that are made from it, and an example of matter that is primary truly, in regard to the things that are made of copper, is then water– if water would be the prime matter to all meltable things, of which copper is one.	النحاس هو الماء ان كان الماء هو الهيولى الأولى للذائبات التي النحاس واحد منها .

Text 3.3] Metaph. Z.3, 1029a21–23

Greek Text	English Translation
λέγω δ᾽ ὕλην ἣ καθ᾽ αὐτὴν μήτε τὶ μήτε ποσὸν μήτε ἄλλο μηδὲν λέγεται οἷς ὥρισται τὸ ὄν.	*By matter I mean that which in itself is neither a this, nor a quantity, nor anything else by which being is defined.*

Arabic Translation (Bouyges, p. 771, 11; p.772, 1–2)	English Translation
وانما اقول هيولى للذى بذاتها لا يقال اى شىء هى ولا كمية ولا شىء اخر البتة من الذي به تحد الهوية .	*By matter, I mean that which in itself is not said to be anything, nor a quantity, nor anything else whatsoever by which being is defined.*

Commentary Rushd (Bouyges, p. 775, 16–17; p. 776, 1–5)	English Translation
ثم اخذ يبين اى الهيولى هي هذه الهيولى التى يجب ان يعتقد فيها انها جوهر وهي التى يصدق عليها هذه الاقوال فقال وانما اقول هيولى الذي بذاتها لا يقال اى شىء هى ولا كمية ولا شىء اخر البتة من الذي به تحد الهوية ويريد وانما اعنى بالهيولى الشىء الموجود بذاته من غير ان يكون كيف ولا كم ولا غير ذلك من سائر هويات المقولات وانما قال ذلك بدلا من قوله انها الموجودة بالقوة جميع هذه الاشياء اعنى المقولات العشر على ما تبين فى السماع .	*Then he clarified what this matter is that must be considered to be substance, and it is to which these statements are true, so he said: 'by matter, I mean that which in itself is not said to be anything, nor a quantity, nor anything else whatsoever by which essence is defined.' By this, he means: By matter, I mean the thing that exists in itself without being a quality, a quantity, or any other of the categories' essences. He said this instead of saying that it is what exists potentially as all these things, namely, the ten categories, as explained in the Physics.*

Text 3.4] Metaph. H.2, 1042a32–36; b1–8

Greek Text	English Translation
Ὅτι δ᾽ ἐστὶν οὐσία καὶ ἡ ὕλη, δῆλον· ἐν πάσαις γὰρ ταῖς ἀντικειμέναις μεταβολαῖς ἐστί τι τὸ ὑποκείμενον ταῖς μεταβολαῖς, οἷον κατὰ τόπον τὸ νῦν μὲν ἐνταῦθα πάλιν δ᾽ ἄλλοθι, καὶ κατ᾽ αὔξησιν ὃ νῦν μὲν τηλικόνδε πάλιν δ᾽ ἔλαττον ἢ μεῖζον, καὶ κατ᾽ἀλλοίωσιν ὃ νῦν μὲν ὑγιές, πάλιν δὲ κάμνον. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ κατ᾽ οὐσίαν ὃ νῦν μὲν ἐν γενέσει, πάλιν δ᾽ ἐν φθορᾷ, καὶ νῦν μὲν ὑποκείμενον ὡς τόδε τι πάλιν δ᾽ ὑποκείμενον ὡς κατὰ στέρησιν. καὶ ἀκολουθοῦσι δὴ ταύτῃ αἱ ἄλλαι μεταβολαί. τῶν δ᾽ ἄλλων ἢ μιᾷ ἢ δυοῖν αὕτη οὐκ ἀκολουθεῖ· οὐ γὰρ ἀνάγκη, εἴ τι ὕλην ἔχει τοπικήν, τοῦτο καὶ γεννητὴν καὶ φθαρτὴν ἔχειν.	*That matter is also substance is clear; for in all opposite changes there is something that underlies these changes, e.g., if it concerns [change of] place, that which is now in one place and then in another; and regarding magnitude, that which is now of such a size, and then smaller or greater; and regarding alteration, that which is now healthy and then ill. Similarly, if it concerns [a change of] being, there is something which is now coming-to-be, and later passing-away, and which is now underlying as 'this something' and then underlying as something in privation. The other kinds of change follow this one. This one, however, does not follow one or two of the others; for it is not necessary that, if something has matter that allows for locomotion, it also contains matter that is generable and destructible.*

Arabic translation (Bouyges, p. 1029, 11–17; p. 1030, 1–5)	English Translation
قال أرسطاطاليس: فبين أن العنصر أيضًا جوهر، وذلك أن لجميع التغيرات المتقابلات في الوضع موضوعًا للتغيرات ثابتًا، مثل ما في المكان، فإن الذي هو الآن هاهنا يصير أيضًا في مكان آخر. وفي النمو أيضًا، الذي هو الآن على هذا القدر يصير أيضًا أصغر أو أكبر، وفي التغيير، ما هو الآن ذو برء يصير أيضًا ذا سقم. ومثل ذلك أيضًا في الجوهر، الذي هو الآن في الكون يصير أيضًا في الفساد، ويكون الآن موضوعًا لمثل هذا الشيء، ويصير أيضًا مثل الذي يكون في العدم. وسائر التغيرات تتبع هذه، وهذه لا تتبع واحدة واثنين من الآخر، فإنه ليس بمضطر أن يكون ما كان له عنصر مكاني أن يكون له عنصر أيضًا يتكون ويفسد.	*Aristotle said: he showed that the element is also a substance, for in all transformations involving opposites in condition, there is a stable substrate for these changes, just as in spatial change, that which is now here later becomes in another place. Similarly, in growth, what is now of a certain magnitude later becomes smaller or larger. In alteration, what is now of health becomes also of illness. The same applies to substance, what is now in being later falls into corruption, and now it becomes the substrate as such a thing, and it also becomes like that which is in non-being.* *All the other types of change follow from this one, but this one does not follow from one or two of the others. For it is not necessary that whatever*

has a spatial element also has an element that comes into being and perishes.

Commentary Rushd (Bouyges, p.1031, 8–17; p.1032, 1–4)	English Translation

ولما ذكر أن التغيرات يظهر من أمرها اتفاقها في حاجتها إلى الموضوع، أخذ يرشد إلى الجهة التي منها يظهر ذلك، فقال: "فإن الذي هو الآن هاهنا يصير مكانًا آخر"، إلى قوله: "يصير أيضًا في الفساد". يريد: وذلك أنه يظهر، كما أن شيئًا واحدًا بعينه هو الذي يكون الآن في مكان، وينتقل إلى مكان آخر، وشيئًا واحدًا أيضًا بعينه هو الذي يكون أبيض ثم يصير أسود في الاستحالة، وشيئًا واحدًا أيضًا بعينه هو الذي يصير كبيرًا وصغيرًا في النمو، كذلك شيء واحد بعينه هو الذي يصير مرة كائنًا ومرة فاسدًا.

After he mentioned that transformations seem to share the characteristic of requiring a substrate, he began to indicate the aspect through which this becomes evident, saying: 'that which is now here becomes in another place', up to his saying: 'It also becomes in corruption.' He means: just as one and the same thing is what now exists in one place and then moves to another place, and just as one and the same thing is what is first white and then becomes black in alteration, and the same thing becomes large and small in growth – likewise, it is the same thing that becomes existent at one time and perishes at another.

وإنما الفرق بينهما أن الموضوع هو في التغير الذي في الجوهر بالقوة، وهو في سائر التغير بالفعل، وكان وجوده وسطًا بين الذي بالفعل والعدم، وذلك أنه يشبه الوجود بجهة، والعدم بجهة. وهذا هو الذي دلّ عليه بقوله: "ويكون الآن موضوعًا مثل هذا الشيء، ويصير أيضًا مثل الذي يكون بالعدم". يريد: أن هذا الموضوع إذا قبل الصورة أشبه الشيء بالفعل، وإذا خلعها أشبه العدم.

However, the difference between both of them is that the substrate in substantial change is in potentiality, and that in all other changes it is in actuality. Its existence lies midway between actuality and non-existence, for it resembles existence in one respect and non-existence in another. This is what he indicated by saying: 'And now it becomes the substrate as such a thing, and it also becomes like that which is in non-being'. He means: when the subject receives form, it resembles something in actuality, and when it loses the form, it resembles non-being.

وهذا كله قد تقُضِّي في العلم الطبيعي، وإنما ذكر به هاهنا تذكيرًا.

All of this has already been established in natural philosophy, and it is only recalled here as a reminder.