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Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Scientific Philosophy

The *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*

Moshe M. Pavlov

Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Scientific Philosophy

Abū'l-Barakāt is often considered one of the most comprehensive philosophers of the Arabic-Jewish milieu in the medieval age. His extensive and unique philosophical theories, especially his theories in the particular sciences, were seen as a major challenge for the traditional conceptions of the Aristotelian school of thought during and after this period.

Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Scientific Philosophy explores the core material of Abū'l-Barakāt's scientific studies, found in his *magnum opus* the *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*. The book then locates these scientific theories within Abū'l-Barakāt's philosophy more widely. Whilst providing a comprehensive critique of ancient philosophy, including the work of Aristotle, certain affinities between Abū'l-Barakāt's work and that of more modern scientific conceptions are also examined.

Containing vast amounts of previously untranslated text, *Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Scientific Philosophy* sheds new light on the philosopher's scientific theories, particularly with regards to his logical conceptions. For this reason, the book will be a valuable resource for students and scholars of Jewish and Islamic Philosophy, whilst the scientific material will appeal to those studying the history of science.

Moshe M. Pavlov studied philosophy at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, taking his B.A. and M.A. in philosophy and his doctorate in Jewish Philosophy.

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Preface

The planned purpose of this book and its sequel is to present a study of Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's *magnum opus*, the *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*. The study of Abū'l-Barakāt was advanced in modern times by Professor Shlomo Pines, who initiated the present interest in Abū'l-Barakāt and elucidated much of the *Kitāb* in a number of works. However, in his coverage of the sciences and metaphysics, certain topics were left untouched.

The metaphysical study of the *Kitāb* is not an easy work to decipher. One must first attempt to work out the main theories and discussions presented. One may then adopt a more ambitious goal and proceed to present an exposition, in order to show and explain that there is a relationship amongst the various theories from the preceding books of *Logic*, *Physics*, and *Psychology*, which influence its conceptions. By carrying forth this project, one finds that there is an extensive ontological theory with a corresponding epistemological theory. One can thus demonstrate the interconnection of Abū'l-Barakāt's theories, which allows one to consider his philosophical system. The arrangement of this system is optimally presented as Abū'l-Barakāt himself presents it, first through a study of the scientific philosophy and then the metaphysical philosophy. These separate steps have led to the synthesis of the present work.

Abū'l-Barakāt has been conceived as a Jewish philosopher of the Arabic milieu and many have thought that he was an exception to the rule for other Jewish philosophers, who were mostly Talmudists. The historian Moshe Gil, however, has determined that Abū'l-Barakāt is to be identified with the Talmudist Rabbi Baruch ben Melekh. If indeed Abū'l-Barakāt was a Talmudist, as Gil asserts, the nature of his Talmudic work should certainly be recognizable and would no doubt have left a deep impression on those who studied it; for Abū'l-Barakāt's thought is most everywhere novel. The texts reveal that indeed this is the case and that the works of R. Baruch ben Melekh, were widely known, highly regarded, and studied in Europe under different names of R. Baruch. This is an unexpected result, which sheds light on the otherwise obscure life of Abū'l-Barakāt.

Abū'l-Barakāt is a recognized and highly respected figure in the history of Islamic philosophy, comparable to the rank of Maimonides, within the history of Christian philosophy. Together with the *Kitāb* and his commentary on Ecclesiastics, he is to be recognized as the great Jewish scholar that he was. Abū'l-Barakāt

is then to be considered a Jewish philosopher-Talmudist pursuing within the perspective viewpoint of the Eastern Arabic milieu a particular synthesis of Jewish Arabic philosophy. He pursues this goal with the broadest and most extensive theories in the particular sciences, which extend further into metaphysics, presenting us with the most comprehensive philosophy composed by a Jew in the medieval age. Indeed, it is one of the most comprehensive general philosophies ever presented.

From the history and life of Abū'l-Barakāt, one may wish to conceive a broad theological aspiration for the *Kitāb*. There are sufficient reasons to conclude that Abū'l-Barakāt is propounding a general philosophy with a specific meaning. This interpretation may possibly be the case. However, the difficult road that Abū'l-Barakāt follows to achieve this goal is an extremely lengthy one that passes through all the particular sciences of the medieval world and combines itself with a profound metaphysical philosophy, presenting a novel approach to the fundamental problems of philosophical ontology and epistemology. These philosophical conceptions then provide additionally the foundations for a novel theological understanding. In the final movements of the metaphysical philosophy, it ascends to the level of a profound conception concerning the cognition of God. This first book presents his scientific philosophy conceived through the conceptions of the particular sciences, along with his critique of Aristotle.

A work of this nature has been influenced by many. My gratitude extends to all. Special thanks to those who significantly advanced this project: Aryeh L. Motzkin z'l, Binyamin Abrahamov, Gabriel Motzkin, Warren Zev Harvey, and Moshe Gil z'l.

Upon the recent 850th anniversary of the passing away of Abū'l-Barakāt, I present a study of the scientific thought of this important philosopher, whose authentic history is just now beginning to emerge.

Jerusalem, December 2015

Introductory overview

Abū'l-Barakāt titled his book – *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*,[1] which means, The Book of the Culminating Conclusion, that is, that conclusion which is to be drawn based on all the scientific work that is considered and presented. All of the scientific considerations thus tend towards a culminating cumulative conclusion, and it is the importance of this conclusion that Abū'l-Barakāt hints at in the title.

The Arabic word *i'tibār* is usually translated as a consideration, and is often used in the *Kitāb* as a type of hypothesis being considered. The Arabic root *ibra*, of these two words, *i'tibār* and *mu'tabar*, means to reach a conclusion. Hence, Abū'l-Barakāt implies that the *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, the book of the *mu'tabar*, the conclusion to be drawn, attains and conceives these considerations allowing for the properly drawn correct conclusion.[2] The conclusion to be drawn is that it is possible to have a special kind of cognition of God better than the cognition we have of the friends we know. This is not a mystical contention, but rather an epistemological assertion. It is based cumulatively upon the entire scientific and metaphysical study of the *Kitāb*, that is, specifically concerning its delineated epistemological program. Towards the end of the exposition of Abū'l-Barakāt's metaphysical philosophy, we shall consider the detailed exposition and analysis of this revealing passage,[3] for this was the conception that Abū'l-Barakāt wished to reveal at the end of the first book of *Metaphysics*.[4]

The *Kitāb* is divided into three books, according to the three fundamental sciences of logic, physics that includes psychology, and metaphysics. The particular sciences of physics, psychology, and logic can and should be studied separately and prior to the subsequent metaphysical discussion. It is most beneficial, however, to be aware of the broader conceptions influencing the study of these sciences. Indeed, this is essential for understanding certain critical points of the scientific discussion itself and relating the scientific philosophy to the metaphysical. It will also help to give insight into the nature of the scientific principles. Conversely, the book of *Metaphysics* of the *Kitāb* can properly be understood only by considering the deliberations that have their origin in the previous portions studying the particular sciences. These metaphysical discussions often extend topics, which have been mentioned earlier in the *Kitāb*.

Thus, there is a complex relationship between these two studies. We begin with this study of the particular sciences, while outlining and glimpsing the general

approach. There is a method that Abū'l-Barakāt follows that allows him to formulate certain fundamental principles in the sciences. These principles are extracted from the lower sciences to those higher along the hierarchical ladder of the sciences.[5] Thus, the principles of the sciences are part of what constitute the principles of the 'existent *qua* existent.' The number of these sciences can be encompassed by the three main scientific studies of the particular sciences. This grants the principles of the sciences a hierarchical relationship that continues on with the further enunciated principles of the metaphysical discussion. In addition, the principles have a special embedded relationship to the general and broad conceptual scheme, which encompasses both the sciences and metaphysics.

Abū'l-Barakāt is exceptional in formulating scientific principles and a philosophy of science that are relevant for our modern scientific studies. He accomplishes this while dismantling the then accepted fundamental Aristotelian concepts and dismissing its principles, which still influence science today. We thus start with this basic critique of Aristotelian being; for it is the critique of the basic conceptions that allows Abū'l-Barakāt to conceive his new structure for the sciences. The explicit critique of Aristotle is focused on transforming the Aristotelian notion of being to Abū'l-Barakāt's conception of existence, thereby establishing the foundations for novel scientific, metaphysical, and theological conceptions. It is possible to formulate some of these conceptions in a general manner as an overview of his conceptual system. Due to the meticulous foundations and definitions of the terms upon which Abū'l-Barakāt builds his philosophy, this can be approached by those searching for a philosophy that begins with fundamentally clear and basic conceptions.

Aristotle's notion of knowledge of the sciences purports to give us an understanding of the world. Some often think of it as pertaining to certain facts or doctrines. The special science of metaphysics included two broadly considered fundamental questions: how we know, the epistemology, and what it is that we know, the ontology. The conceptual structure relating all the sciences to a higher structure of origin and the more general science of metaphysics was initialized by Aristotle and persisted for many centuries, with its rippled effects reaching us even today.

Abū'l-Barakāt conceived that the particular sciences have their own principles, not necessarily derived from a strict structure dictated by the higher science of metaphysics. Each science conceives its own principles and shares these principles that the other related sciences will further utilize. However, when we consider the fundamental conceptions of epistemology and ontology, there is a definite relationship between the particular sciences and the broader conception. There is a certain embedding of the sciences in an encompassing conceptual scheme of what is referred to as epistemological ascertainment.[6] This broad conceptual scheme will be outlined and discussed within this chapter; the remaining chapters will delineate the details of this scientific philosophy.

These two fundamental subjects of ontology and epistemology require that we consider the basic components utilized in the conceptual scheme. This means that we will have to conceive the notions of the existent and existence along with

the thing, and to conceive how these concepts evolved from the ancient Greek conception of being. It also requires that we consider what the notion of ascertainment consists in.

Utilizing the concepts of the Arabic milieu, Abū'l-Barakāt advanced a precise conception of the existent and existence and their combination. He added onto the traditional concepts to conceive a well-defined combined conception of the existent with its existence, and a further notion of the mental existent and mental existence. His epistemological conceptions however, had an abrupt alteration from the former concepts.

The Greek legacy originating from Plato was to consider the notion of knowledge to be undefinable. According to Abū'l-Barakāt, what is commonly referred to as knowledge is analyzed into different modes of ascertainment: we initially perceptively feel then apprehend; upon this apprehension we cognize, and then we know. These are precisely described in the scientific philosophy, and the higher levels formally defined at the onset of the metaphysical philosophy. This is not merely an alteration with a complicated synonymous terminology; rather Abū'l-Barakāt conceives these different conceptions as distinct notions of a broad spectrum reflecting our cognitive processes. The result of this cognitive process is further defined in the metaphysics as the mental attribute of knowledge asserted to be an existent. These separate but related and cumulative notions are different functions within the spectrum of our ascertainment of the world.

Abū'l-Barakāt coalesces the ontology and the epistemology into a broad conceptual scheme by relating them, stratifying the modes of epistemology with the different levels of ontology. This unified conceptual scheme goes beyond the specific ascertainment of our cognition of the sciences extending below to a precognitive state of a felt awareness of self and an externally directed perceptive feeling, and ultimately ascending upwards in the ladder of ascertainment to the higher cognition, knowledge, and the special cognition that we may attain concerning God. Abū'l-Barakāt's scientific philosophy describes the first stages of this cognitive ascendance, whereas the further steps are developed in the metaphysical philosophy. He insists that we must conceive the principles of science and subsequently the further principles until their ultimate and final completion.

This philosophical system is described through these two studies, first the scientific then the extended metaphysical. The first stages encompassing the particular sciences are found to be extremely felicitous and fruitful in their novel and fundamental principles; they prepare the foundations upon which the further metaphysical discussion will be conceived. For Abū'l-Barakāt there was a third study conceived separately extending beyond the systematic metaphysical philosophy, which speculatively considered many other important questions of philosophy.

Introduction to Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's scientific philosophy

The presented scientific study, comprised of separate studies of the particular sciences, encompasses the major scientific conceptions of Abū'l-Barakāt in the

sciences. It is significant for its fundamental conceptions of physics, psychology, and logic. The presentation is composed of two parts: a theory of existence and a theory of the existent. We begin in Part I with Abū'l-Barakāt's critique of Aristotle conceived as a theory of existence. Existence is understood by Abū'l-Barakāt in two manners: when we consider an existence of an individual; or in a different manner as a general conception, when, for example, we conceive a necessary or possible existence, or distinguish between mental existence and existence of the external world. The ascertainment of individual existence is by the means of apprehension, whereby we apprehend the attributes of the existent. There is a distinct difference between these two notions, although they are interconnected.

We study the different passages, whereby Abū'l-Barakāt considers existence in this general sense, on its own without conceiving it through the notion of the existent. We follow the order of the ontological conception in initially presenting this critique, studying first this theory of existence before inquiring into the more elaborate cognition of the existent.

The passages studied in this first part are particularly important, due to the fact that the discussions concerning the nature of existence coincide with the severe critique of Aristotle and the Aristotelian philosophical tradition concerning being. This critique, when considered from the viewpoint of the conjunction of the passages studied, comprises a complete rejection of the Aristotelian notion of being. Abū'l-Barakāt reconstructs the notion of being, replacing it with the conception of existence within his philosophy. This is referred to here as the transformation of being to existence.

This critique of the Aristotelian philosophy is one of the most challenging and comprehensive in the history of philosophy, and is thus important and relevant for everything that follows. The material for this critique deals with scientific concepts from logic, psychology, and of the metaphysical discussion. It is presented in order to understand the rejection of the Aristotelian doctrine of being, thereby presenting the historical background and pivotal position from which Abū'l-Barakāt's theories begin to take shape. At the same time, it delineates the foundation for the theory of existence. Upon the rejection of the accepted conceptions of the philosophical tradition, we are able to begin to conceive the formulation of the novel foundational fundamental theories.

In Part II, we focus on the existent as this is emphasized by Abū'l-Barakāt in the sciences, which is the existent existing on its own. Abū'l-Barakāt describes the division into the three sciences – as the sciences of the existent: physics with its extension into metaphysics, psychology, and the science of logic. The conception of the existent on its own comprises those characteristics that the existent has of itself, in contrast with the existent with its existence. In the *Physics*, Abū'l-Barakāt conceives the notion of the inertial motion of the existent conceived in itself as the basic principle of physics. This motion occurs when the existent body is left to itself, without any other external force acting upon it being considered. Similarly, in the *Psychology*, there is a fundamental conception of the isolated soul on its own with an internal function; this is an objective

notion of a functional feeling that is extended and conceived of all existents. In its pristine form, this feeling is not related to any other thing. The basic operative function within the existent is conceived to be prior to perceptive feeling of external existence. Feeling itself, however, is unable to distinguish between what is internally felt and externally perceived.

These characteristics of the existent that we consider on their own are referred to as being intrinsically innate to the existent. They are conceived to be of the existent through the conception of principles. They are a part of the existent itself, without conceiving any externally caused influences or any acquired characteristic. This mode of conception corresponds to a definite ontological level, according to Abū'l-Barakāt.

The notion of the existent in itself is meant to be primarily intuitive, yet it will be possible to be precisely defined in terms of internal and external influences. The more precise definition will consider the internal aspects of the existent separate from the sphere of the external influences. These characteristic internal aspects compose the nuclear essence of the existent, referred to by Abū'l-Barakāt as the *dhāt*, the ipseity.[7] Thus, when we refer to the existent in itself, we will mean this conception of the ipseitical existent in itself, that is, a conception of the ipseity of the existent alone. This conception disregards the attributes that constitute the individual existence of the existent.

In the psychological study, the notion of perceptive feeling is extended, and its development in us, as humans, leads to the spectrum of the different conceptions of apprehension, cognition, and knowledge. We thus have different ways of ascertaining the ontological reality by different forms of our cognitive apparatus.[8] We will find that the nature of the existent on its own will be ascertained by means of what Abū'l-Barakāt refers to as the first cognition.

In the *Logic*, we find a certain generalization of the existent, the thing. This conceives in one unified conception the mental existent with the external existent of the world. Thus, the study of logic is not limited thereby to the external world, but studies equally the mental conceptions. There is further depicted in the logical study, a conception of the thing itself, related to that studied of the external existent.

Abū'l-Barakāt states early on in the *Metaphysics* that there are but three fundamental sciences that suffice for the conceptions of science, revealing at the end of the *Kitāb* that the division of the sciences comprises logic, psychology, and the combined study of physics and metaphysics.[9] These three subjects of the particular sciences from the books of *Physics*, *Psychology*, and *Logic* of the *Kitāb* therefore comprise our study of the existent on its own with its innate characteristic principles. The basic conceptions studied will be conceived of the existent in itself – its inertial motion and the internal feeling of the existent – being basic references of our study. We thus study in the sciences of physics and psychology the innate characteristics of the existent in itself, which are subject to this first cognition; in logic, we study the generalized notion of the thing conceived by perceptive feeling. These notions are fundamental in the sense that the further development of the theories of these sciences are subject to these conceptions.

Based upon the notion of the existent in itself studied in the sciences, the nature of metaphysics is distinctly partitioned from that of the other particular sciences. Still, certain topics of metaphysics, for example, feeling and the concept of time, are reconsidered in the *Metaphysics*. In the metaphysical discussion, the scope of the conception is broadened to include a second cognition; hence, the subject is conceived beyond the limited characteristics concerning the existent on its own to include the wider conception of the existent with its existence. This study is then the first step for conceiving the broader scope of Abū'l-Barakāt's philosophy, with glimpses beyond towards these extended metaphysical conceptions, in order to better conceive the nature of the scientific conceptions themselves.

Notes

1 Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (1939). Hereafter cited as *Kitāb*.
2 Shlomo Pines renders the title as "The Book of What has been Established by Personal Reflection." See Pines (1979: 262).
3 This conception is explicit in the *Kitāb*. See the full passage *Kitāb Met*., p. 139, ll. 8–19. The Arabic expression *ibra* with its cognates is reiterated there a number of times. An analysis of this passage and its importance is presented in Chapter 7 in the sequel, *Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's Metaphysical Philosophy:* The *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar* (cited as AMP), which analyzes Book One of the *Metaphysics* of the *Kitāb*. Passages referred to here from the *Metaphysics* will often be further analyzed in AMP.
4 The reference is most usually to the first book of the *Metaphysics*, which contains the main subjects that enter into the philosophical system. The *Metaphysics* refers hereafter to the first book of the *Metaphysics* of the *Kitāb*, unless otherwise stated.
5 For the hierarchical nature of the principles of the sciences including metaphysics, see *Kitāb Met.*, p. 5, ll. 7–15.
6 This will be presented as the epistemological hierarchy of ascertainment within the conceptual scheme.
7 This term renders the *dhāt* specifically and was adopted for this purpose by Pines.
8 These two expressions ascertainment and cognitive will be used throughout in this special manner. The notion of ascertainment is meant to be a general term for reception encompassing the broader spectrum of feeling, apprehension, cognition, and knowledge. Cognitive describes the general nature of the higher levels of this spectrum.
9 See *Kitāb Met.*, p. 214, l. 12, where the division of the three sciences is given.

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1 An introduction to the life and philosophy of Abū'l-Barakāt

1.1 The history and life of Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī

Abū'l-Barakāt Hibat Allah ibn Malka al-Baghdādī is the Arabic honorific epithet for the Jewish philosopher Rabbi Baruch ben Melekh,[1] sometimes referred to as Nethanel ben Eli, who lived in the second half of the eleventh until the middle of the twelfth century (d. 1165). He was born in Balad near the city of Mosul,[2] in what is today northwest Iraq. Mosul in the twelfth century was a thriving city with a Jewish population of over 25,000 households.[3] Nearby to the west of Mosul in Syria lies the renowned city of Aleppo also known as Ḥalab, and to the southeast the central focal point of both Jewish and Islamic cultural activity during this period, the city of Baghdad.

The name Nethanel was used by Abū'l-Barakāt's student Isaac ben Abraham, (Yitzhak ben Avraham) Ibn Ezra, in a poem that he composed in his honor, upon the completion of Abū'l-Barakāt's commentary on Ecclesiastics, which Isaac wrote down. In this poem he refers to Abū'l-Barakāt "as one of [his] time," as he was commonly called in the Arabic – *awḥad al-zamān*.[4] Abū'l-Barakāt was considered a very great philosopher, as the above appellation shows, and it is often remarked that the Arab community considered him to be a philosopher of the stature of Aristotle. It is known that he lived a fairly long life for some ninety-five years, approximately from 1070–1165. It was during this period that he worked as a medical physician and wrote his *magnum opus*, the *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*. He was famous for his novel cures in medicine,[5] while his philosophy was a major challenge for the traditional conceptions of the Aristotelian school of thought during and after this period. In 1163, at the age of ninety-three, Abū'l-Barakāt is said to have converted from Judaism to Islam along with two others, his student Yitzhak and his medical student, the mathematician Samuel ben Judah (ibn Abbas).[6]

Abū'l-Barakāt is recognized as a major Jewish philosopher of the medieval period, for he composed his philosophical work and his important commentary on Ecclesiastics as a Jew. He evidently had some internal or externally caused crisis during his last years, when he was blinded and quite elderly. Although, all this is readily admitted, the historical picture is extremely limited in precise information, for there is little knowledge of Abū'l-Barakāt's life during the time

that he wrote his literary works, that is, within the great majority of his life span during which he was Jewish. Present-day historians are not even in complete agreement concerning his first name, that is, concerning his Hebrew name amongst the Jews. It is known that Abū'l-Barakāt converted, while the explanation or cause of this conversion is unknown. The earlier Arab historians have tried to fill this gap with varied explanations; as four different reasons are presented for his conversion, they all tend to beg the question of their veracity.[7]

Some following the poem of Ibn Ezra have referred to Abū'l-Barakāt by the name of Nethanel. The Israeli historian Moshe Gil, however, has asserted that the name Abū'l-Barakāt ibn Malka is the Arabic equivalent of the Hebrew name Baruch ben Melekh and insists that one should realize that these two are indeed one individual. According to Gil, Abū'l-Barakāt's Hebrew designation of Nethanel is found only once in the above-mentioned poem, whereas we do possess real historical evidence concerning the life of R. Baruch ben Melekh. On the basis of this conception and other historical documents, Gil has urged convincingly that the researchers studying Abū'l-Barakāt should take notice that his real name is Baruch ben Melekh and that he is to be identified with this Rabbi, whose fragmentary commentaries on the Talmud have been discovered.[8]

> There is also information about the Jewish side in the life and activities of Abū'l-Barakāt. Firstly, we must pay attention to the fact that the person known as Abū'l-Barakāt Hibat Allah ibn Malkā is none other than Baruch b. Melekh, known for the surviving remnants of his Talmud commentaries. In the Geniza writings, there are citations from Talmud commentaries, and as Abramson has shown in one of his articles, it may be concluded that he wrote a commentary to the tractate *Sōṭā*. In that article, Abramson also published a poem written by Baruch b. Melekh (i.e., Abū'l-Barakāt). This poem will yet be mentioned below. Modern scholars who studied Abū'l-Barakāt did not observe his identity with Baruch b. Melekh. Indeed, as I will show below, Isaac b. Abraham Ibn Ezra in a poem dedicated to him calls him Nethanel, an accepted Hebrew translation of the Arabic name, Hibat Allah (gift of God), but nowhere else – as far as we know – is he called Nethanel, while his *kunya*[9] Abū'l-Barakāt undoubtedly suits a man by the name of Baruch.[10] The Arabic name Malkā is Melekh[11] (king) in Hebrew.[12]

Concerning R. Baruch ben Melekh not all that much is known. There have been, as mentioned by Gil, different fragments discovered including that of a Talmudic commentary. Other fragments have led the scholars studying them to conclude that this Rabbi Baruch was held in great esteem by the Jewish communities in the East.[13] Unfortunately, works attributed to R. Baruch ben Melekh have not reached us. However, he is quoted by a few rabbinic sources, where it is clear that he is highly regarded and that he wrote commentaries on parts of the Talmud.[14] One can conclude from Gil's assertion that Abū'l-Barakāt was, as many of the great Jewish philosophers of the middle ages, a learned Talmudist. However, the proposed identification of Abū'l-Barakāt with Rabbi Baruch ben

Melekh has not provided an abundance of new historical information. For these reasons, those who conceived that Gil had only a matching of names have not been excited by this contention.

When considering the life history of Abū'l-Barakāt, one may reason that if Abū'l-Barakāt was a Talmudist his works in this field would indubitably have had a broad influence. For Abū'l-Barakāt is throughout a very original thinker who proceeds meticulously with a logical method. Such a thinker could not have failed to have a great influence on the medieval study of the Talmud. However, when considering R. Baruch ben Melekh this influence seems to be decisive although limited.

One finds upon closer inspection, however, that there are corresponding quotes that imply that the writings of R. Baruch ben Melekh were quoted and known in Europe under different names, and that these virtual authors did have an important influence. This result helps us fill the gap in compiling a composite history of the life of Abū'l-Barakāt and his literary productions, including his vast Talmudic commentaries, for there are extensive quotations from these virtual authors. These impress upon us that he was a highly regarded learned Talmudist, and as such, there is little doubt that he lived as an observant Jew; they further show us his methodology and approach to the study of the Talmud. They demonstrate the hitherto unknown spread of influence concerning his extensive Talmudic commentaries throughout Europe and the East.

The name of the famous supposed European Talmudist is R. Baruch ha-Sephardi (the Spaniard), known alternatively as R. Baruch me-Yevan (from Greece). In the past 800 years, nothing factual has ever been discovered concerning these two literary figures, except one letter; not even a supposed place of birth or where they thrived, despite the description of their names. It is for this reason that they are to be regarded as virtual, only literary authors. The texts demonstrate that the real individual that resided in the East was known as R. Baruch ben Melekh.

Two traditions existed early on in the thirteenth-century medieval period: The Jews of Spain referred to R. Baruch as the Spaniard, whereas R. Yitzhak of Vienna in his composition often refers to R. Baruch from Greece.[15] There has been some confusion concerning who precisely this Rabbi Baruch was. In modern times, due to their being quoted similarly, it was correctly concluded that R. Baruch the Spaniard is identical with R. Baruch from Greece, and that there was only one real individual.[16] What gives credence to the further identification of these two literary figures with R. Baruch ben Melekh is that once again we have discovered exactly similar quotes attributed to R. Baruch ben Melekh matching those attributed to these literary figures.

It is to be emphasized, these quotation comprise unique interpretations of R. Baruch that are not mentioned by others. They thus identify their author singularly and show that the author of the manuscripts being quoted is one. Thus, it is to be concluded that there is but one author to the works quoted in the name of R. Baruch ha-Sephardi/me-Yevan/ben Melekh. These matching quotations are found in the thirteenth-century Talmudic commentators quoting from the earliest

manuscripts of R. Baruch. Quoting R. Baruch ben Melekh is R. Yehuda al-Medari of Ḥalab; quoting R. Baruch ha-Sephardi is R. Zechariah Agmati. There are three such sets of matching quotations, which show that the manuscripts attributed to R. Baruch ben Melekh are identical with those attributed to R. Baruch ha-Sephardi.[17]

The compelling conclusion is that the source manuscripts for the writings attributed to these two European Rabbis are derived from another individual. For, as mentioned, there is no history of any other real information concerning these virtual literary figures. As we now have a link to a real existing figure, one must thus conclude that there is but one R. Baruch. This is the Talmudic commentator known and quoted in the East as R. Baruch ben Melekh.[18] In the Talmudic tradition in Spain, his writings were quoted as R. Baruch ha-Sephardi, whereas in *Ashkenaz*, the central European school, they were quoted as R. Baruch me-Yevan.[19]

Thus, the works of R. Baruch were studied in the East under the name of R. Baruch ben Melekh and distributed throughout the main Jewish centers in Europe, where they became known under different pen-names. As R. Baruch is to be identified with Abū'l-Barakāt, as Gil has insisted, the writings of Abū'l-Barakāt and the commentaries of R. Baruch ben Melekh/ha-Sephardi/me-Yevan, are all from one single individual. There are many additional reasons for asserting this identification, for there are definite correlations in style, response towards the traditional schools, conciseness, and originality of thought.

The importance of this identification is due to the enormous literary output attributed to R. Baruch ha-Sephardi, from which some important commentaries have reached us and are currently under intensified study. He not only produced an early commentary on almost all of the Talmud, but in addition glosses of Jewish law, *halacha*. The surprising conclusion which emerges is that the philosopher Abū'l-Barakāt, often thought of and received as a respected Islamic thinker, had a former history as being an exemplary Talmudist who wrote one of the most comprehensive and original commentaries on the Talmud.

This aspect of the personal history of Abū'l-Barakāt has not been conceived previously. Admittedly, we have known of his commentary on Ecclesiastics,[20] and since the identification by Gil, we have been aware of R. Baruch ben Melekh's Talmudic commentaries and those quoting him. From the quotations of R. Baruch ben Melekh by R. al-Medari, we are able further to conceive that R. Baruch was regarded as an important and major Talmudist. This present discovery, however, allows us to consider and compare the style, mode of thought, and comprehensive compilations of the singular and unique thinker R. Baruch, who is Abū'l-Barakāt.

All of the great Jewish philosophers in the Middle Ages had an extensive Talmudic background, although it had appeared that Abū'l-Barakāt was the exception to the general rule. Given the present state of our knowledge, this conception must now be corrected. Abū'l-Barakāt is to be considered one of the most eminent Talmudic commentators of the medieval period with a wide range of influence on subsequent Talmudists, which permeated all the main geographic areas where the Jews lived.

We find a certain correlation between his Talmudic commentaries and his major philosophical work. Both contain comprehensive and thorough examinations of their material, questioning in depth the previous work of predecessors, and deciding issues with novel conceptions dependent on logical proof. With the testimony of the matched quotations, the parameters of study comparing the two different kinds of composition, show that there is sufficient reason to conclude that the author of the vast *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar* is the author of the comprehensive commentary on the Talmud attributed to R. Baruch.

Perhaps one of the reasons for considering Abū'l-Barakāt to be a philosopher without a Talmudic background may have been his reported conversion to Islam. This, as mentioned, occurred when Abū'l-Barakāt was quite elderly and blind. It is at this advanced age that he is reported to have had a crisis, and according to the historical description of the Arabic historians decided to change his life course and convert to Islam. The different reasons given by the Arabic historians as to why Abū'l-Barakāt decided to embrace Islam do not mention any idealistic belief, although this is precisely what one would expect when a philosopher of the stature of Abū'l-Barakāt converts. We expect a compelling ideological reason, if this was not a coerced conversion. No ideological element is apparent or identifiable.

Gil dealt with this problem concerning Abū'l-Barakāt, Ibn Ezra, and Ibn Abbas. He suggested three possibilities: (1) They truly believed in Islam; (2) Abū'l-Barakāt was possibly a cynical nihilist who was highly interested in his social status; and finally (3) a speculation that possibly Abū'l-Barakāt and his two students converted because they were despaired over the fact that the Messiah had not yet come.[21]

For Gil, only the third speculation offers a compelling reason. The disappointed messianic fervor that Gil mentions is what is referred to as the Alroy uprising. David al-Rō'ī, called for a Jewish armed revolt against the Islamic governmental authorities. This was centered in Mosul with a peak occurrence somewhere around 1125. Many aspects of this uprising remain unknown to us. It was perhaps a meaningful event for Abū'l-Barakāt, however, this does not appear to be in the manner which Gil suggests. Interestingly, one of the main historical sources of what actually happened originates from Abū'l-Barakāt's student Samuel. Another connection appears in that R. Baruch corresponded with the Gaon Eli, head of the Baghdad Yeshiva where al-Rō'ī studied.[22] That Abū'l-Barakāt would thus relate to David al-Rō'ī, whom he likely was aware of as a student at the yeshiva, accept him as a Messiah, and then further be disappointed from his unsuccessful coup seems quite speculative.

Gil's conjectures do not properly discriminate between on the one hand, the conversion of Samuel, who composed a literary defense of Islam against Judaism, and Abū'l-Barakāt and Yitzhak Ibn Ezra on the other. It also leaves out a wide group of students, who were presumably also under the influence of Abū'l-Barakāt. Although Abū'l-Barakāt's conversion is not to be historically doubted, we do not find in either the *Kitāb* or in his commentary on Ecclesiastics any mention of Islamic doctrine. It is for this reason that this

conversion is often considered as a life-saving expedient act.[23] As Pines pointed out, Abū'l-Barakāt agreed to his conversion only after his daughters were exempted from converting and granted their inheritance, a practice contrary to Islamic law.[24] Thus, his conversion to Islam, as a non-coerced voluntary act may well be doubted.

We do not find any report of change in the philosophical thought of Abū'l-Barakāt that could support an ideological change. Moreover, it is to be noted that a substantial Jewish element is emphasized in the *Kitāb*, in Abū'l-Barakāt's discussion of the Jewish concept of a Special Name for God, the *Shem ha-Meforash* . His commentary on Ecclesiastics has elements aligned with a keen Talmudic scholar. Thus, the *Kitāb* cannot be considered as having an entirely neutral outlook concerning religious belief.

The Sunni theologian Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzi was greatly influenced by Abū'l-Barakāt's philosophy, citing it prominently in his discussion of physics. This has granted Abū'l-Barakāt a respectable place and influence in Islamic thought, which should not detract from his previous work as a great Talmud scholar, or from his own emphasis on those very Jewish notions found in the *Kitāb*. This influence should rather be regarded as being similar to the influence of Maimonides upon Saint Thomas Aquinas, which greatly influenced Christian thought.

The question of pressure on Abū'l-Barakāt must be considered, for there is a poem attributed to R. Baruch ben Melekh in one manuscript, which suggests its author was a coerced convert who deeply regretted his conversion. In this manuscript, the poem begins with, "[These are] the words of R. Baruch ben Melekh."

> And [if] I praised him beginning each prayer,
> By way of mouth it was said and my heart answered me,
> You lie and your testimony is false,
> I have returned already to the shadow of the covenant,
> From God I request pardon.[25]

The fact that there is such a manuscript, which attributes a regret of having feigned Islam to R. Baruch ben Melekh, must be considered quite an unexpected coincidence for those who consider that R. Baruch is not Abū'l-Barakāt. For it is not known from any other source that R. Baruch ben Melekh converted or feigned Islamic belief.

There is, in addition, a statement quoted from R. Baruch ben Melekh mentioning coercion, which is quite peculiar.

> Do not judge your fellow man until you are in his place. And Rabbi Baruch ben Melekh z"l [may his memory be blessed] explained, do not judge your friend, i.e., if you have seen an old man who has forgotten his studies due to his being coerced [*anus*], e.g., if he was sick, do not think less of him and do not judge him harshly until you have reached his position. For if he will get sick he will understand the coercion [*anus*] of his friend.[26]

The maxim of this saying deals with the general case of one's judging his fellow man. R. Baruch explains this as referring to the special case of an old man who is coerced, *anus*. The Hebrew word *anus* means here one who is disabled; however, it also has the connotation of an enforced convert. It is used in this commentary twice, where both times it appears to be unnecessary. The superfluous expression may be hinting in an esoteric manner that R. Baruch was a coerced *anus*, one who was forced to convert. Thus, he implies that he should not be judged harshly, for as an old man he has been coerced. This might well be an esoterically written coded message from the past.

Thus the story of R. Baruch, who is the highly regarded philosopher of the Jewish-Arabic milieu, Abū'l-Barakāt, is really quite intriguing and exciting. The full story as to how the writings of Abū'l-Barakāt circulated under different names is still obscure and awaits further research. It is to be expected that the pieces of the puzzle will become increasingly clarified in the future. Other manuscripts wait to be found to corroborate upon the initial discovery described here.

What is indubitable is that Abū'l-Barakāt in his old age did not have the quiet and recluse, which is granted to some philosophers on retirement. His achievement in this case are even greater, and he should be recognized for this accomplishment. For Abū'l-Barakāt left us with his completed *magnum opus*, which is only comparable in its breadth to Avicenna's encyclopedic *al-Shifā'* (*The Healing*), which served as a model for the structure of the sciences and metaphysics during the entire medieval period. In the long history of philosophy, there have been philosophers, who after falling prey to hostile authorities were thereby unable to leave their philosophical work to posterity. Abū'l-Barakāt despite a severe crisis left a legacy that challenged the philosophical tradition for over one hundred years, and which today is a rich source of philosophical ideas and conceptions. Similarly, R. Baruch provided one of the most interesting, informative, and comprehensive of all the Talmudic commentaries, which influenced many of the major Talmudic commentators of the twelfth century in their jurisdiction. Thus despite the somewhat difficult conditions encountered in the Eastern medieval world of Baghdad, Abū'l-Barakāt/R. Baruch has left as a combined legacy of one of the richest treasures of medieval Jewish literature, with an extended influence upon both subsequent Jewish and Islamic thinkers.

For our more practical purpose, it is sufficient to realize that the *Kitāb* was composed when Abū'l-Barakāt was a Jew, and thus in some manner propounds a philosophy for the Jewish-Arabic milieu. As there are no Islamic elements in the *Kitāb* whereas there are distinctive Jewish elements, the details of an historical crisis that occurred later do not influence our exposition of his philosophy; for they do not appear to represent any relevant philosophical considerations. The perspective adopted in the *Kitāb* is mostly an objective scientific and metaphysical approach, mostly neutral in regard to any particular religion.

Thus, we will study the *Kitāb* in this objective manner. We are unable at this time to conceive precisely the story lurking behind the scenes, concerning the unique social background and the conditions of its writing.[27] This story is

interesting, but whatever conclusion one reaches, it does not affect our attempt to understand the conceptions of Abū'l-Barakāt the philosopher.

The conclusion from these historical and rabbinic sources may help us understand the general social surroundings. It should, moreover, depart a deeper insight of what Abū'l-Barakāt intends, when he describes to us at the beginning of the *Kitāb* that he was reluctant to make his work public. We may also have a better insight for understanding why he restrains from any distinct remarks on politics, ethics, or a particular religious life.[28]

After conceding the authenticity of the identity of Abū'l-Barakāt with R. Baruch, we will now continue this historical sketch, augmenting from what is known concerning R. Baruch to clarify the life history of Abū'l-Barakāt. This may lead us on what appears to be a speculative path, but it is the direction which the historical documents and texts concerning R. Baruch lead us. The further history of his life as we now attempt to decipher it will comprise the social background of Abū'l-Barakāt the man. It will not influence how we are to understand his scientific conceptions, the penetrating proofs, and the further development of his philosophical ideas, but rather an introduction to his social milieu.

1.1.1 The life history of Abū'l-Barakāt – Rabbi Baruch

According to the Arabic historians, Abū'l-Barakāt came to Baghdad somewhere near the age of thirty in order to study medicine. However, concerning the earlier history of Abū'l-Barakāt nothing is mentioned. The later Islamic thinkers and historians did not consider what his life was like prior to his arrival in Baghdad.

One may inquire what happened to Abū'l-Barakāt during his formative years. To assume that medicine was his first formal study seems highly unlikely, for although Abū'l-Barakāt was recognized in his time as a prominent medical doctor, it appears that he approached this study to attain a profession. This we find in the case of other Jewish philosophers, for example, Maimonides, ha-Levi, and Gersonides, who were all medical doctors. In order to bridge this gap concerning his personal history, we will consider what is known concerning the life of R. Baruch ha-Sephardi.

There is one document, which has many consequences and opens the door for further research. This is a letter written from R. Baruch ben Yitzhak of Ḥalab, to R. Baruch ben Shmuel. It was assumed by Professor Epstein that this letter was written to our R. Baruch ha-Sephardi/me-Yevan.[29] From this letter, one may infer that the two had once studied together, and that our R. Baruch lived near Southern Italy or the nearby islands for a certain time. If one disregards the contention of the Spanish school, this letter implies that our R. Baruch studied in Ḥalab, that is, Aleppo, and later departed from there to the Greek islands or Southern Italy.

Given the proximity and roadways departing from Mosul to Aleppo, the suggestion that R. Baruch studied in Aleppo before departing for a stay in Southern Italy is a real possibility. Epstein, however, attempted to reconcile the claim of

the Spanish tradition and conjectured that his stay in Europe was in Spain before departing to Southern Italy. There is no actual evidence, no mention of a city or school of thought, and no record or connection with any students or teachers from Spain, which could hint to the fact that R. Baruch ever set foot on Spanish soil. Concerning those quotations where R. Baruch is said to refer to his being in Spain or that he is a Spaniard, we find alternative manuscripts that state otherwise.[30]

Hence, it is plausible that R. Baruch spent time in either Southern Italy or the northeastern Greek islands. This is further implied by R. Yeshaya Ditrani, known as the R"yd,[31] who lived in twelfth-century Italy. He quotes R. Baruch, mentioning him along with other rabbis from Greece, thereby implying that he had lived in Greece.[32] R"yd himself describes his own stay in the Jewish Greek community with the Romaniotes, an ancient Jewish sect whose origins stretch back 2,000 years. The Romaniotes had distinct cultural features and spoke a particular Greek dialect called Yevanic.

There being two indications for his residing in Greece, it is possible that R. Baruch lived with such a Jewish community, while residing or visiting Europe. This suggestion could further explain R. Baruch's translations of Greek and Latin terms in his commentaries, and Abū'l-Barakāt's displayed etymological conceptions from the Greek philosophical lexicon displayed in the *Kitāb*.[33]

One may inquire, however, what would have led to his migration to Europe. As was often the case for Jewish migration, oppression of the authorities may have been a factor. We know that the leaders of the preceding generation of the Baghdad Jewish community, R. Hai Gaon and his father R. Shrira Gaon,[34] had suffered from religious persecution and that they were imprisoned and tortured.[35] Some Jewish historians describe this period as a difficult time of oppression. As is the case in our time, also then Baghdad was not liberally minded towards its minorities. Unfortunately, during this specific period the direct historical information is minimal. However, it is distinctly possible that the situation worsened at the time of Abū'l-Barakāt, due to the Alroy affair that centered at Mosul.[36]

The twelfth century is described by some historians as a declining era for Jewish culture in the East. However, this is only because they have not taken into consideration the work of R. Baruch ben Melekh, Abū'l-Barakāt. For Abū'l-Barakāt's philosophical work alone is a comprehensive encyclopedic work, which revolutionized the philosophical tradition. Conceived together with his Talmudic commentaries, this indicates an ascending cultural rise. Thus, the historical facts recognizable today indicate and attest to a cultural peak during this final period of Babylonian Jewry. In his letter to the Jewish community of Ḥalab, the Gaon Shmuel ben Eli refers to the correspondence of R. Baruch with his father, the Gaon Eli.[37] R. Baruch was thus a recognized personality in the life of Baghdad's elite Jewry. Such is the evidence that one receives further from additional sources.[38]

The following somewhat fragmented composite historical picture emerges. After studying in Aleppo, Abū'l-Barakāt departed to the nearby Greek islands,

possibly because of pressures from the Alroy affair. He may have spent some time with or near these Romaniote communities. During this period, he would have had time to learn Greek and possibly Latin; he may also have been influenced by the study of Greek philosophy amongst the Jews. Abū'l-Barakāt would thus have acquired a cosmopolitan cultural influence in his exposure to different languages, customs, and philosophical perspectives; in addition, a proficiency in languages and a general vantage point for conceiving the leading schools of philosophy early on in his career. This somewhat complex background may help to explain the influence that he received from Avicenna, yet his reluctance to accept all of the conclusions of his philosophy. Similarly, we find his following of R. Ḥananel, while disputing with him on the correct interpretation of the Talmud.[39]

This proposed history may help us understand certain other unique features that we find in the *Kitāb*. There is a focused attention upon Aristotle and Plato, with an influence from the Neoplatonians. At the same time, he develops and maintains his own particular point of view. These are unique features for a philosopher of the medieval age, which may have been acquired by someone who was exposed to diverse cultures and philosophies, for they attest to a cosmopolitan background.

Yet, we are still faced with serious issues concerning how and why was the identity of Abū'l-Barakāt and R. Baruch concealed for so long? The fact that the oppression of the authorities at this time was exceedingly great could explain the caution and secrecy. Gil concedes that the full story has yet to be told, suggesting that in the future additional sources will shed light on the question.[40] Whatever the full explanation, the complete writings of Abū'l-Barakāt have been concealed for a period of 850 years after his death; no one during this period prior to Gil having conceived that the highly regarded philosopher, who established a new philosophical tradition, was R. Baruch, one of the most influential Talmudists. Indeed, portions of his commentary have just recently begun to be analyzed.[41]

This is the legacy that the writings of Abū'l-Barakāt impart to us: A philosophical work covering virtually all of the encompassment of Avicenna's *al-Shifā'*, a vast Talmudic commentary, and a commentary on Ecclesiastics, described by Pines, as "undoubtedly one of the important works in Jewish-Arabic literature."[42] In all three areas of study, we find Abū'l-Barakāt/R. Baruch to have conceived many penetrating, often novel, conceptions of thought.

It is true that we know certain aspects while not knowing certain others concerning his individual history. Perhaps, we therefore feel that we do not really know Abū'l-Barakāt/R. Baruch. As if knowing his own fate, Abū'l-Barakāt has already informed us what it really means to know a philosopher.

> And thus he who recognizes Aristotle today by means of his sayings in his science and [through] his philosophy recognizes him better than one who saw him during his life in his bodily form but didn't cognize what we recognize of him today from his knowledge and cognition, which they are the most proper and characteristic attributes.[43]

Thus we leave our background study of the life of R. Baruch to continue on our survey, in order to study and recognize the philosophy of Abū'l-Barakāt from his writings, and thereby to know him better than those who knew him during his life in Baghdad.

1.2 From Greek and Arabic philosophy to the conceptions of the *Kitāb*: a general survey delimiting the intellectual background and setting

1.2.1 On the history of philosophy in the middle ages and its milieu

It is often found worthwhile when studying the history of a specific philosopher to consider his relationship with the various schools of philosophy which preceded his own efforts and towards which he tried in some manner to synthesize or to refute. This is especially true of the period considered in this book, the medieval philosophy, which is characterized by philosophers that in different manners strove to preserve the philosophical tradition.

This historical method certainly carries with it an element of truth; for although alterations and different emphasis appear, overall, the medieval philosophers were followers of the Greek philosophical schools. For it is during this period that the main schools of Greek philosophy were deemed to have provided the basic philosophical framework and doctrines for all further philosophical questions. From the major trends of these ancient schools, they inherited and further adapted their own philosophy. In this manner, the Arabic philosophers exhibited originality while continuing the philosophical quest of the ancient systems, with alterations arising from the religious spirit of the middle Ages. These philosophers were themselves referred to as the *falasifa*, which meant in connotation the followers in doctrine of Plato and Aristotle. The *falasifa* were not, however, the only group of thinkers who considered philosophical questions during the medieval period. The Arabic theologians pondered related questions and pursued a dialectical study known as the *Kalām*. This alternative approach tended to cause a certain rift amongst the philosophically minded, for not all of the *falasifa* agreed in their view of philosophical thought and doctrine.

Abū'l-Barakāt has sometimes been studied in this semi-historical manner. When we come to consider his philosophical thought, however, we are faced with a somewhat unique phenomenon. We find throughout his philosophy a true adherence to philosophical truth stemming from his allegiance to logical proof. In this, he is a rigorous philosopher even by modern standards, not a mere propagator of a system within a philosophical school of thought. He himself stresses at the beginning of his work this critical attitude for the method of philosophy. His allegiance to a philosophical school is non-existent; rather, he formulated an independent philosophical school of thought, which was active for a period of one hundred years after he died. His relationship towards the philosophers that preceded him is not one of blind acceptance, for he provides proof against many of their doctrines by means of logical arguments. These features are found in the

Kitāb to a high degree, for Abū'l-Barakāt pursues these goals in a most uncompromising manner. Thus, he follows out his conclusions from his own principles in a logically rigorous manner, even when these results lead to an entirely new basis for philosophy, and where opposite to that of common religious beliefs.[44]

It is true that Abū'l-Barakāt was absorbed in Avicenna's version of the Aristotelian philosophical tradition and influenced by its fundamental notions and problems. Nonetheless, he had the rare trait of being able to stand within the realm and sphere of a philosophical tradition, while conceiving a new foundation upon which philosophy was to be based. From one historical philosophical perspective, it may appear that Abū'l-Barakāt's philosophy is to be considered subservient to the conceptions of Avicenna. However, it was only by a fluke of history that his own reconstruction of philosophy was not the predominate one.

Thus our historical orientation concerning Abū'l-Barakāt's philosophy is necessarily and fundamentally altered. On the one hand, we have to consider the basic conceptions that he absorbed from the preceding philosophies, and how his critique of the philosophical tradition, the domineering Aristotelian conception of philosophy with its Platonic elements, led to his novel philosophy. Abū'l-Barakāt is very selective in the list of philosophers he mentions by name – Plato, Aristotle, and Avicenna. However, against this tradition he raises a devastating critique striking at its underlying foundations, which he alters. Hence, on the other hand, we must throughout consider how these altered elements emerging from his critique and further discussions combine together to conceptually alter the scientific and metaphysical viewpoints of philosophy.

The outline of the historical background concerning Abū'l-Barakāt's philosophy and his milieu must therefore tread carefully, for his reception of philosophy was not merely passive but was reconstructed and altered at every step. It is thus not only important to comprehend the preceding philosophers, but to conceive how Abū'l-Barakāt conceived the history of philosophy, that is, his own philosophical heritage. With some alternation between these themes, we will review the historical intellectual background and setting, from a general viewpoint of the broad issues.

Certain basic conceptions are common both in the ancient Greek philosophy and in the subsequent Arabic reception and reformulation of this philosophy. In general, the philosophers of both periods understood their subject as dealing with notions of being. Although, admittedly, the Arabic philosophers realized that their conception of existence was distinct from and an alteration of the Greek notion of being.

For the early Greek philosophers, being, that is, *ossia*, was monolithic. Until its culmination in the Platonic ideas, being is conceived as a monistic concrete permanent entity. The notion of a division within being implying a complex whole, or the necessity of a higher form of being would be absurd to the early Greek philosophers.

Many of the questions and problems of philosophy considered by Abū'l-Barakāt were already posed in Greek philosophy, which found its culmination in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. These questions begin with

the Socratic quest of finding the definitions of all things. Thus, Plato and Aristotle sought the definitions for knowledge and for being. Their conceptions of being led to consider the extension and generalization of these notions. In the case of Plato, this led to an idealized state of pure forms, whereas for Aristotle, it led to a programmed study of continued research with a specific probing that culminated in the questions and answers found in his book of *Metaphysics*.

The Platonic ontological theory of being has as its basis the thesis of separation, the *chorismos*, which supposes a separation between the intellectual forms, the realm of the ideal *noetic* and the sensual objects of the *somata*. According to Plato, all activities of thought are subject to the postulate of separation.[45] The Platonic epistemological conception of knowledge is based on the conception of innate knowledge, the process of *anamnesis*, whereby the innate knowledge of the forms of the *noetic* realm reiterate themselves in the realm of *somata*.

The original monistic ontological notions of the early Greek philosophy thus developed into two separate parts, albeit, the underlying nature of being is continuous and homogenous in both. These separate parts, the forms of the idealistic world and the *somata* of the sensual world, are not connected; nor is that knowledge derived from these two worlds. Abū'l-Barakāt refers to these separate notions of being, as Plato's worlds, and asserts that there are four such worlds found in Plato: "And Plato said: [there are] the world of the Divine and the world of intelligence and the world of the soul and the world of nature."[46]

This Platonic doctrine emphasized by Abū'l-Barakāt is reiterated at four different junctions in the *Kitāb*.[47] When mentioning this, he appears to concur with Plato's conception; this doctrine, however, is finally mentioned with a specific critique.[48] His own conception of a mental realm of forms along with other conceptions of certain abstract entities appears to have a Platonic influence. Abū'l-Barakāt's conception of mental forms, however, is not Platonic, for his forms are not totally separated from existence and they are accessible to our cognition.

According to Abū'l-Barakāt's understanding of Plato's separate worlds, there is an implied causal relationship of the higher worlds upon the lower. Thus, these four worlds are hierarchically structured by a conception of causality. He implies further that from this conception originated both Aristotle's conception of the First Mover who does not move, and Avicenna's conception that God does not know particular things;[49] two notions Abū'l-Barakāt tenaciously rejects.

The conception, that Plato advocated a certain quadratic conception of being is suggested elsewhere in Arabic philosophy, for we find this notion suggested in the commentary of Averroes.[50] Thus, certain Arabic philosophers conceived Plato as advocating the divine as one, the soul as two, intelligence as three, and nature as four. Given his predilection for the number three in his philosophical divisions, one may speculate that Abū'l-Barakāt is hinting of a broad transformation of the four worlds of Plato to his triadic conception.[51]

Aristotle agrees with the notion of being, that is, non-monistic or dyadic being, but he disagrees about its mode. Aristotle writes of this, "so that our controversy will be not about their being but its mode."[52] This mode, or *troppou*, the mode of being, is of two connected parts, the form and matter, as these are

conceived by Aristotle. In addition, for Aristotle the nature of being is continuous and homogenous. He denies that being can be conceived as one by any understanding of the notion of one.[53] Being has a non-monolithic nature in that the two aspects of being cannot be separated. Being cannot be solely one thing, as substance, for that would abolish the nature of the attributes which are necessary to describe being. The exemplification of being, for Aristotle, is throughout a division into two distinct aspects of being, ultimately a conception of dyadic being. True being, for Aristotle, is of substance; but substance, excluding the First Cause, never exists alone.

This dyadic conception of being is implemented throughout by Aristotle. In the conception of the categories, this divides into the ontological notions of substance and its adhering attributes; in physics, we have matter and its inherent form; in psychology, we find the faculties of the soul functioning alongside with the associated intellect; and in logic, this is depicted as the subject and predicate. In his epistemology, Aristotle denies that the basis for knowledge is innate. Rather, he conceives that the sensual *somata* gives rise to knowledge. However, he does not completely deny knowledge of the *noetic* forms, which are for him the conception of the universal.

Abū'l-Barakāt does not relinquish the conception of innate knowledge. He refers to both our instinctually innate conception of the sciences, and further affirms innate knowledge found in the biological realm.[54] He conceives his principle of motion to be of the physical body, and works out his epistemological structure from a basic internal innate function of our psychology towards the world we feel.

Philosophy based upon the notion of existence and the existent, developed in the Aristotelian tradition of Arabic philosophy, as an alternative to the conception of being. This movement of Arabic philosophy evolved the metaphysics of being to the conception of an existent. In the philosophy of Abū'l-Barakāt this transition stands out as being fundamentally important. The resulting conception, however, is more complicated than usually conceived and the explicit transformation more broad.

Abū'l-Barakāt did not merely receive the notion of an existent and embed this concept with other Aristotelian notions.[55] He perceived a transformation of being to existence that alters much more than the fundamental notions of metaphysics. Abū'l-Barakāt's detailed polemics directed against Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition on this point, must be considered one of the broadest and most complete critiques aimed at the Stagirite philosopher. They mostly center on Aristotle's dichotomous distinctions that pervade his philosophy; by logical argumentation, the basis for these distinctions is dissolved.

He was well aware that this transformation implied a much larger alteration of thought concerning the basic ideas of the existent and existence, which permeates the structure of the sciences. He conceived three separate studies: The study of existence, the study of the existent, and a study of the existent with existence. As the notion of an existent cannot be considered entirely in isolation, but must be considered with existence, the former two imply the additional study of their

combined interaction, the existent with its existence. He further stratified these different ontological conceptions linking them with different epistemological modes.

Although the importance of knowledge for the conception of metaphysics cannot be overestimated, a definition of knowledge was not found by the Greeks. The only solution was Plato's negative result initiated in the *Theaetetus*, an unsuccessful attempt to frame a definition for knowledge. Thus, knowledge, both innate to the forms or learned and acquired by the senses, was concluded to be undefinable. This doctrine was implicitly accepted by all subsequent philosophy. It was boldly challenged by Abū'l-Barakāt in his opening definition of knowledge in the *Metaphysics*.

Unable to define the epistemological basis of philosophy, Greek philosophy centered upon the basic ontological questions of metaphysics: the notion of being and its alteration into its various forms. To pursue this aim, the philosophers adopted the method of dialectical analysis. Inherent in this analysis was a basic dual distinction differentiating between the two dichotomous aspects of the study being considered. This analysis brought forth most of the important ontological distinctions of the sciences. These dual distinctions concern the subject matter and content of the scientific theories, without affecting the epistemological conceptions. This method, highly successful concerning what exists, was not as fruitful in its analysis of the epistemological. These epistemological notions were conceived independently, not linked to the ontological scheme. Hence, at its basis, this method included the fundamental dichotomy that distinguishes between the notion of being and our knowledge of this being, that is, between the ontological and the epistemological. Abū'l-Barakāt disagrees with these dual distinctions, especially with the complete separation of the ontological from the epistemological.

The general philosophical approach of both Plato and Aristotle was preserved with different variations, during the period referred to as Neoplatonian until the advent of Arabic philosophy. Abū'l-Barakāt never mentions explicitly the Neoplatonians. This does not mean, however, that he was unaware of them or that he did not study them, for many of the Arabic philosophers influenced by the Neoplatonian philosopher Philoponus refrained from mentioning him. From different contexts we can discern that Abū'l-Barakāt was influenced by certain conceptions of the Neoplatonians in the sciences, specifically in physics and psychology there appear to be an influence from the commentaries of Philoponus.

During this period, it was accepted that one would adopt either a Platonic or an Aristotelian point of view. One could therefore adopt a general position to explain all varied phenomenon; or attempt to work out the details of the Aristotelian philosophy. To some extent, these two approaches were already combined by the Neoplatonians, for they retained the Platonic forms in metaphysics, while at the same time they continued to develop the different sciences based on the Aristotelian dichotomies. Concerning the ontology of being, Plotinus conceived the ontological hierarchies as extending down from the Absolute. This conception led to

the introduction of monism and further to pantheism in philosophy. For, if everything of being is from the First, what is derived from the First was often conceived as one and of the same nature as the First.

Prior to the philosophical schemes formulated in Arabic philosophy by al-Fārābī and Avicenna, philosophical learning consisted mostly in commentaries upon the Greek philosophers, Plato or Aristotle. Al-Fārābī, in certain of his works, implies that one could interpret the systems of Plato and Aristotle as having the same goal. Arabic philosophy thus wished to consider a certain synthesis of these foundations of philosophical thought. Avicenna, the Arabic philosopher of the East prior to Abū'l-Barakāt, continued further with this aim and the initial concepts of al-Fārābī, achieving a synthesis that comprised characteristics of both Plato and Aristotle.

Amongst the Arabic philosophers, Abū'l-Barakāt quotes only Avicenna. He does not seem, even in the *Logic*, to be interested in Avicenna's predecessor al-Fārābī. This influence of Avicenna's *The Healing*, is evident in the sciences, where we sometimes find Abū'l-Barakāt following the order of the topics of Avicenna. In the *Metaphysics*, however, after an initial prolegomena, the entire topic structure is altered, and Abū'l-Barakāt's direct quotation of Avicenna is only in those places where he thoroughly criticizes his doctrine.[56]

One may think this surprising, since Avicenna's logical approach, together with various conceptions present in his philosophy may seem to have a conceptual affinity with those of Abū'l-Barakāt. There can be no doubt that Abū'l-Barakāt did assimilate a significant portion of the Avicennian philosophy, including the basic philosophical terminology and the defined topics of the sciences. Nonetheless, the situation explicit in the *Metaphysics* is that there is scarcely a remark of approval concerning Avicenna and the Aristotelian philosophical tradition. Thus Avicenna is a major part of the legacy that Abū'l-Barakāt studied, was influenced by, and argues against.

As the Neoplatonians that preceded them, both al-Fārābī and Avicenna conceived ontological hierarchies. However, these hierarchies were no longer conceived to be of pure being, for they extended down from the Necessary Existent. This hierarchy thus defined certain ontological levels of existents, conceived along different lines from that of the hierarchy of being conceived by the earlier tradition. In addition, we find in al-Fārābī and Avicenna a closer merging of the epistemological with the ontological. The merging of this notion was emphasized in the Arabic conception of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the unification of existence. Arabic philosophy further conceived and emphasized a unified triadic nature of the intellect – *intellectus-intelligens-intelligible*, reason, the subject reasoning, and that what we are reasoning about.

The hierarchical emanative scheme considered by Avicenna posited the elements of Aristotelian philosophy, including its conception of causality derived from the First Cause; additionally, it relied on the Neoplatonic idea of emanation. Avicenna ordered the emanative scheme into a hierarchy where the possible, the substantive matter, and existence itself emanated from a creative impulse from the necessary. The pinnacle of the hierarchy is God, who as for

Aristotle, is the First Mover. Avicenna accepts this basic element of Aristotle's philosophy; but moreover He is the necessary being, of pure form and essence.

Avicenna composed for the first time a major structured encyclopedic work of philosophy, the *al-Shifā'*, which succeeded in reformulating many specific problems in philosophy with a reconstruction of the Aristotelian metaphysics. This went beyond a mere commentary to Plato and Aristotle. Although he challenged certain orthodox Peripatetic conceptions, his philosophy is within the Aristotelian tradition. Abū'l-Barakāt often views him as the representative of this school, although realizing certain of his suggestive ideas. Thus, Avicenna's philosophy can be seen as comprising a partial alteration of the philosophical tradition that was received, amidst his attempt to reconcile certain of his own ideas within the orthodox Aristotelian tradition.

As the philosophers were broadening their scope of conceiving being, the religious thinkers were busy absorbing certain of the ideas discussed by the religious approach of the Islamic theology, the *Kalām*. These dialogical discussions opened the gates to consider various ideas mutually, even if the consistency of these notions in an orthodox philosophical approach could be questioned. Thus, there occurred a certain broadening at the base of philosophy.

From the growing *Kalām*, the Jewish thinkers prior to Abū'l-Barakāt, referred to as *Gaonim*, for example, R. Saadia, R. Hai, and R. Shmuel ben Ḥofni found the basis for their work. These Jewish thinkers were religious thinkers who combined elements of the Jewish religious tradition together with notions from traditional philosophy. Although often following the basic structure of the *Kalām*, they combined this with a keen view of philosophical conception. They were thus not completely of one school or thought but somewhat individual thinkers.

He would also have noticed his Spanish predecessor, Solomon Ibn Gabirol and his non-Aristotelian elaboration of a pure metaphysics of form and matter; for his student Ibn Ezra had arrived from Spain, where *The Source of Life* was well known. Thus, the problem of conceiving a notion of form and matter not based upon the actual and potential was presented.[57] In this manner, the synthesis of approach considered by al-Fārābī along with the further conceptual synthesis of Avicenna was subjected to a further expansion within Jewish circles, with other varied conceptions from the Jewish tradition.

In Arabic philosophical thought of a theological nature, the rule of Avicenna was challenged by the theologian al-Ghāzalī. He was at once responsible for writing basic textbooks reviewing the philosophy of Avicenna, and then later attacking Avicenna from his particular theological viewpoint. He combined this with his own personality, which combined mystical speculation with philosophical acumen. Abū'l-Barakāt does not quote him even when he enters the polemical discussions between al-Ghāzalī and Avicenna. It is possible that he discerned from the precedent of al-Ghāzalī, that the grand philosophical system of Avicenna was subject to severe criticism. Abū'l-Barakāt, however, elevated this critique and centers it on the wide conception of Plato's worlds, the Aristotelian notion of being, and specific doctrines derived by Avicenna. His philosophical critique of the tradition is thus much wider, presented with formal arguments,

and further altered within his own broadly conceived reconstruction of the philosophical structure.

Abū'l-Barakāt does not deny the hierarchical ontology, which was conceived as extending down from the Divine First Existent. However, he distinguishes between the existent and existence and conceives this differently. What is derived from God, conceived as the First Existent, is the existent with its nature, subsequently there is existence. In addition, the attributes are derived from their origin in the First Existent. Remnants of the former ontological hierarchical origination are retained when Abū'l-Barakāt defines his ontological hierarchy, which extends up from the different types of existence.

Abū'l-Barakāt begins the book of *Metaphysics* with a definition of knowledge and from this he deduces the mental existent, that is, knowledge itself as constituting an existent also. Thus he asserts at the beginning of the *Metaphysic*s a certain priority of epistemological knowledge over the ontological hierarchy. It is the epistemological hierarchy that needs to be constructed in order to achieve the correct metaphysical philosophical conception; for, according to Abū'l-Barakāt, it is not proper merely to posit ontological worlds in the fashion of Plato.[58] Thus, the innate of the *noetic* world is not the sole basis for our epistemological cognition.

This priority of the epistemological viewpoint together with the hierarchical conception gives rise to various ramifications. According to Abū'l-Barakāt, the different modes of epistemological ascertainment are hierarchical, corresponding in a specific stratified manner with the underlying ontology, determined through the media in which they are formed. Hence, he develops an ontological hierarchy linked together with his epistemological hierarchy. According to Abū'l-Barakāt, this notion of hierarchy is not entirely an inheritance of monistic being emanating from the First, for existence and its relation to the existent is altered as it comes into the world. There are thus different levels of the ontological hierarchy with different corresponding modes of ascertainment.

We are thus able to discern how the ontological hierarchy of the Arabic philosophers was replaced by a new hierarchy that excluded being, and that was conceived as a more complex epistemological-ontological structure. The ultimate unification of the entire structure was conceived as in other philosophies, as originating from the First. However, this is not asserted concerning the relationship of the notion of the existent to existence, concerning which he discriminates between the First Existent and the other existents. It is this divergence of the existent from existence, which gives rise to the important distinguishable levels in the structure.

Abū'l-Barakāt does not utilize his unique hierarchy to expand the Aristotelian conception, but rather pursues it to demolish it at its base. He is quite thorough in presenting a complete critique of the Aristotelian dichotomous conceptions. He accomplishes this without conceding to the Arabic option of unity of existence. For although everything is descendent from the highest level of the hierarchy, one does not have a unified monism; rather the existent and existence descend separately and are thus altered from their Divine origination, becoming the existent with existence. The epistemological notions similarly originate from

the Divine, but are different in us. Thus, he escapes the pantheism associated with al-Ghāzalī and other Arabic theologians. At the same time, this does not lead to an acceptance of the Aristotelian dyadic conception. For the separation of existence and the existent implies an interactive relationship between them. Hence, although Abū'l-Barakāt's ontology is derived from the one First Existent, it is neither monistic nor dyadic; its basic notions lead to a triadic conception of existence with corresponding ontological levels.

The strict dichotomy concerning the division between the epistemological knower and the ontological known is thus challenged by Abū'l-Barakāt's structure. He goes further by granting the epistemological notions the status of ontological entities and conceiving a similar structure for both. In this manner Abū'l-Barakāt tends to unify the topics of ontology and epistemology. This implies an alteration in the basic notion of the epistemological subject and the ontological object. Hence, the basic dichotomy, formulated by the Aristotelians concerning knowledge and ontological reality, Abū'l-Barakāt discards. In its place, the philosophical structure is rebuilt from its basic undefined elements: namely, existence, and the existent, which correspond to the epistemological notions of apprehension and cognition.

Existence, which is shown here to replace Aristotelian being, is conceived epistemologically by means of apprehension in its two forms: mental and non-mental; similarly, the existent is of two types: mental and non-mental. The epistemological part of this package informs us that there are two other levels – the external existent with existence and the mental existent with its mental existence. These different levels comprise a unity of the intertwined epistemological-ontological structured hierarchy originating from the First Existent. Both the ontology and the epistemological structures originate from the First Existent, where they are one in a different unique sense.

1.2.2 Historical influences connecting Abū'l-Barakāt with the milieu

We can trace further Abū'l-Barakāt's advance upon his predecessors as accomplished by means of definite steps. The first of these is the altering of the basic notions of Greek philosophy. This is true even concerning the basic Greek notions such as *ossia*, being, and *nous*, intelligence. After having altered these fundamental conceptions, Abū'l-Barakāt presents new principles concerning these notions. Then he continues to combine these concepts, which enables him to construct the different theories found in the sciences.

For example, in the *Psychology* the world of *nous* transforms over to the apprehension of the mental realm; the Greek *psyche* becomes the cognitive sphere of the soul's cognition. These become concepts within the epistemological hierarchy based upon the objective form of feeling that Abū'l-Barakāt develops, which is related to an initial speculation mentioned by Philoponus, and considered with a different scope by Avicenna.

We can thus actually trace certain notions of Abū'l-Barakāt starting from the Greek metaphysical quest for knowledge and the ideas, onwards towards the subsequent formulations of the Neoplatonians, along with the implemented

Arabic philosophical conceptions. Following Abū'l-Barakāt's historical summaries, we perceive which Greek notions he replaces with his own basic conceptions, and how from these he constructs his own theories. Following his critique of the Aristotelian conceptions, along with acceptance of certain adopted Neoplatonic notions, we may trace his scientific principles to prior conceptions. This historical work will be followed up in detail. The resultant theories in their developed form, however, are to be considered the product of Abū'l-Barakāt's originality; for their sense of novelty and development show an extensive theory, whose structure extends far beyond their original inception and the historical conceptions they replace.

Abū'l-Barakāt was closely attentive in his consideration of preceding philosophical development including that of Avicenna. Concerning certain topics, for example, in the analysis of space, we find the most thorough and extensive examination of former conceptions and opinions. In a similar vein, we find the work of R. Baruch, who follows the Talmudic commentary of R. Ḥananel, but adopts at different junctures an entirely different approach. What is distinguishable in both of these literary works is that, despite a thorough mention and study of preceding opinions, Abū'l-Barakāt chose to compose his own compilation where new and novel theories are embraced.

Certain ideas found in embryo form are combined with a meticulous development to be further adopted within the hierarchic ontological and epistemological structures. These concepts worked out in the particular sciences were further interwoven into a complex form within the metaphysical discussion. Finally, the overall epistemological-ontological conceptual scheme becomes enhanced in a broad intertwined and extended conception.

There is thus a continuous thread beginning with the Socratic quest seeking a definition for knowledge that proceeds on with Plato's innate knowledge of ideal forms, and the Aristotelian conceptions of the universal principles of the sciences. It was further enhanced by certain advances of the Neoplatonic conceptions of the sciences, and the unified hierarchic schemes of al-Fārābī and Avicenna. This interconnected history may be seen to have had a certain culmination in the generalized theories of Abū'l-Barakāt, who utilized all of these sources to achieve an organic comprehensive view of the sciences, metaphysical philosophy, and the higher speculative philosophy.

1.3 An introduction to the terms and concepts of the *Kitāb*

1.3.1 Introductory background to the basic conceptions

Abū'l-Barakāt adopts a small number of basic conceptions by means of which he manages to present the philosophy of the *Kitāb*. For the most part these are clearly conceived, where along the way others notions have a role. The presentation of these terms and concepts in this section is meant to facilitate the presentation, serving as an orientation and reference for the terminology and recognition of these concepts within the theoretical structures.

As in any philosophy that seeks the fundamental nature of ontology, the notion of being is analyzed. Abū'l-Barakāt, however, rejects the Aristotelian notion of being throughout. Instead of being, the existent and existence are the two basic conceptions elaborated. They are presented together at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* as undefinable notions.[59] Existence is closely related to the existent that is hierarchically connected with the thing. The notion of existence is mentioned by Abū'l-Barakāt whenever he dismisses an Aristotelian sense of being.[60] Instead of adopting the Aristotelian notion of substance with its inherent qualities, that is, the categories, we have in the metaphysical theory, the conception of an existent with its inner ipseitical essence, attributes as states, and ensuing actions that come forth from these attributes. The sciences utilize these notions without explicitly asserting this conception.

Abū'l-Barakāt is clear concerning the origins of the basic conceptions. Whereas his theory of existence has as its derived origin the Greek conception of being, the notion of the existent has as its primary source the conceptions of Arabic philosophy and Islamic theology. Both al-Fārābī and Avicenna conceived in their philosophies the *mawjūd*, the existent; along with it, they asserted the *wujūd*, existence. It has been suggested, that the notion of the existent and the distinction between essence and existence found in these philosophers had their origin in the prior discussions of the *Kalām*.[61] These discussions and arguments of the *Kalām*, which were perhaps the precursory discussions for the philosophers concerning the existent, centered upon the delineation of the notion of the existent from that of the thing, the *shay'*. The notion of the thing is related also to the notion of non-being, or the *ma'dūm*, which the conception of a thing includes. According to R. Wisnovsky, this notion studied in Greek and Arabic philosophies gave rise to the ontological hierarchy of the existent and the thing, for both Arabic philosophers and the *Kalām* theologians.

> The problem originates with some cryptic lines of Parmenides, is discussed at length by Plato in the *Sophist*, is analyzed by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* and the *Physics*, and emerges as a coherent ontology among the Stoics, who – like the Mutazilites and al-Fārābī – put "something" (*ti*) at the top of their ontological pyramid, above even "existent" (*to on*).[62]

This comparison between the notion of a thing and an existent is present in the *Kitāb*, when Abū'l-Barakāt mentions that the thing is more general than the existent.[63] This is because the thing generalizes the notion of two types of existents. This passage shows that Abū'l-Barakāt is aware of the conception concerning the hierarchy of the existent and the thing, and indeed asserts it.[64] The discussion concerning the 'it-is-it' describes a generalized conception of the thing modeled upon that of the existent, with the ipseitical thing and its attributes.

The origin of the existent from the *Kalām* is related to another and different conception of the *Kalām* – the notion of the atom, conceived as one indivisible thing undividable into parts, as a discrete, separate, and unified unit. With this notion of an indivisible existent, an inseparable unified unit, the religious

theologians were able to conceive of God as an existent. This atomic notion hovers in the background, when Abū'l-Barakāt wishes to conceive the ipseity of the existent alone, that is, without its attributes. However, he departs from a conception of an atomic existent, when he conceives the broader notion of the existent, and utilizes the conception of the divided existent consisting of three parts.

1.3.2 Abū'l-Barakāt's conception of the existent and existence

The theories of the existent and existence in the *Kitāb* are somewhat more intricate than they may appear at first. For Abū'l-Barakāt will consider separately the different aspects of the existent and existence and then later consider their relationship, the *mawjūd bi-wujūdihi*, the existent with its existence. This latter notion differentiates the metaphysical study from the scientific, and further the regular non-divine existent from the conception of God as the First Existent in virtue of Himself.

One may wish to conceive existence as that which comes forth from and with the existent. This conception is not entirely mistaken, however, it is a highly simplified picture of a more complex state of affairs. According to Abū'l-Barakāt, existence is not merely that which comes forth from the existent, for existence originates and comes forth independently of the existent. In addition, there is not one depiction of the relationship between the existent and existence, but there are two cases: that of the Divine Existent and the regular existents of the world. As the scientific study centers on the notion of the existent conceived within the limits of the conception of the ipseity, the broader conception that relates the existent and existence and unifies the First Existent to be identical with the First Existence is not of the scientific study or essential for it.

By repudiating the entire Aristotelian notion of being, Abū'l-Barakāt did not confuse Aristotelian being with existence, or conceive existence as a mere aspect of the existent. He further did not consider being with the associated notion of quiddity, *māhiyya*, to be metaphysically important. He rather asserts Divine existence different from the non-divine, depicting the latter as "a complex of an attribute and attributee i.e., an existent that has existence."[65] These are fundamental distinctions of Abū'l-Barakāt's philosophy from that of the philosophical tradition, which lead to many philosophical differences in the conception of the existent and existence. Thus, despite the fact that the origin of his conception of the existent is clearly derivable from the Arabic sources, including Avicenna, his conception is still quite different.

The conceptions of Avicenna and many who followed him conceived existence and the existent as constituting one theory, the existent being of existence. Abū'l-Barakāt consistently considers existence and the existent separately, developing these theories independently and defining their origination as coming forth one subsequent to the other. This origination is described thus: "Thence is the realization of existence: first the ipseities, then the attributes, which are in the ipseities and belong to them."[66] The mentioned ipseities refer to the ipseitical existent, which preceded its attributes; the attributes refer to the existence of the existent.