ARISTOTLE’S THEORY OF CAUSES
AND THE HOLY TRINITY
NEW EVIDENCE ABOUT THE CHRONOLOGY
AND RELIGION OF NICOLAUS “OF DAMASCUS”

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Résumé : L’identité et la datation de Nicolas le Péripatéticien, l’auteur d’un sommaire de la philosophie d’Aristote, ont fait l’objet d’un article récent de Silvia Fazzo paru dans la Revue des Études Grecques. Contre la datation courante, fondée sur l’identification de Nicolas à l’historien de grand renom Nicolas Damascène (7e siècle av. J.-C.), Fazzo a montré que Nicolas avait plus probablement vécu au cours de la période couvrant les 6e au 8e siècles ap. J.-C., et plus précisément à l’époque de l’empereur Julien l’Apostat (361-363). Cette hypothèse trouve un appui dans un nouveau fragment en traduction hébraïque découvert par Mauro Zonta, dans lequel Nicolas cherche à expliquer la Trinité de Dieu au moyen de la doctrine aristotélicienne des causes : Dieu est un, en tant que sa substance est une, mais Dieu est également trois, puisqu’il est à la fois causes motrice, formelle et finale du monde. Dans la mesure, évidemment réduite, où un fragment si court est susceptible de datation, l’époque de Julien paraît la plus probable.

Abstract : The identity and chronology of Nicolaus Peripateticus, the author of a summary of Aristotle’s philosophy, was recently discussed in a paper by Silvia Fazzo published in the Revue des Études Grecques. The usual dating, based upon the identification of Nicolaus with the famous historian Nicolaus Damascenus, places Nicolaus in the 8th century BC, but Fazzo argues that it is more likely that he lived in the period ranging from the 3rd to the 5th centuries AD, and more precisely, during the age of the Roman Emperor Julian (361-363 AD). This hypothesis is supported by a new fragment in Hebrew translation, discovered by Mauro Zonta, where Nicolaus gives an explanation of the Christian doctrine of God’s Trinity in terms of Aristotle’s doctrine of causes : God is one, being a single substance, but He is also three, insofar as He is the efficient, formal, and final causes of the world. Though the fragment is very short, the authors contend that it is nevertheless plausible to date it from the age of Julian.

From 1841 onwards, the Syrian Peripatetic scholar Nicolaus, the author of a comprehensive Compendium of Aristotle’s Philosophy (Περί τῆς ἀριστοτέλους φιλοσοφίας, De philosophia Aristotelis, thereafter : DPA), has been identified as the
historian Nicolaus of Damascus (b. 64 BC ca.), a rhetor working at the service of Herod the Great (d. 4 AD). The identification was first suggested by Eduard Meyer, the author of a Geschicht der Botanik and editor of a Latin version of Nicolaus’ treatise Περὶ φυτῶν. The identity for Nicolaus the Peripatetic was promptly accepted by Gottlieb Friedrich Roeper (the author of a book on Bar Hebraeus), later adopted by Eduard Zeller, and never radically questioned thereafter.

Since no ancient source supports either the identification of the two Nicolaus (i.e. the rhetor and the philosopher) or the 1st century BC as date of composition for the DPA, both issues have recently been reconsidered afresh: based on both external evidence about Nicolaus and the overall methodological character of the DPA, a significant shift in chronology has been suggested, from the 1st century (as originally proposed) to the 3rd-5th centuries AD, and possibly as late as the 4th. For, according to the well-known 13th-century Syriac author Gregory Bar Hebraeus (whose works are now an important source for fragments of the DPA and the only extant source for Nicolaus’ chronology) at the time of Julian the Apostate (361-363 AD) Nicolaus was one of the most prominent authorities in philosophical wisdom. Moreover, according to Bar Hebraeus, this Nicolaus lived not in Damascus, but in the Syrian city of Laodicea.

The evidence for an identification of the two Syriac Nicolaus is thus reduced to a minimum, especially taking into account the words of the Church Father Sophronius of Damascus, who prized his city for having been the native place of no less than thirteen Nicolaus, all of whom prided themselves for their philosophical skills.

A new piece of evidence — a fragment recently discovered by Mauro Zonta — comes now to press the identity issue further and to shed new light on Nicolaus. As...
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will be discussed in what follows, there is reason to believe that he was a Christian
and was well acquainted with the Christian dogma of the Holy Trinity.

If this is the case, Nicolaus produced a peculiarly Peripatetic version of this
dogma : God is one, being a single substance, but He is also three, insofar as He is the
efficient cause, formal cause, and final cause of the whole world. The fragment im-
mediately follows a reference to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, and this suggests that it was
quoted from Nicolaus’ exposition of this book (a work of his which is quoted by a
famous scholion in the ms. of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, gr. 1853,
f. 312r, possibly a section of the DPA itself). If so, it is likely that its original location
in the book was framed within an account of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics, Book Lambda*,
ch. 6ss. (although it must be remembered that Nicolaus did not always keep the same
order of contents as the one he found in Aristotle’s books).

As for Aristotle’s own theology, the question whether his God, the Prime Mover,
is an efficient or final cause is a very controversial matter, and it is not surprising that
Nicolaus wished to harmonize those views as he could find good reasons in favour of
both.

3. This may already be suspected because of a fragment by him discussing angels, quoted in a Latin manu-
script and regarded as unauthentic (insofar as Christian) by Pierre Duhem, *Le système du monde. Histoire
des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic*, vol. III, Paris, Hermann, 1915, p. 245-246. This frag-
ment, found in the ms. of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 16089, folio 153v and having the ti-
tle *Haec sunt extracta de libro Nicholai peripatetici*, includes a passage where the author affirms that Plato
“imitates God, who at the beginning has made the greatest and noblest creation, that of the angels and of
the intelligences”. The Latin fragment had already been published in Barthélémy Hauréau, *De la phil-
osophie scolastique*, vol. I, Paris, Pagnerre, 1850, p. 471-472, where the above quoted passage is found as
follows: *Plato [...] imitatur namque Deum qui posuit principium a fortiori et nobiliore creatione et an-
gelorum creationem seu intelligentiarum*. Hauréau had already regarded the passage as substantially un-
authentic, since he quoted it as taken from a pseudonymous work. Duhem tried to corroborate this hy-
pothesis by pointing out that the fragment ends with the statement : “And this is what Averroes affirms”.
According to Duhem, this is proof that the author of this fragment lived after Averroes, so that he cannot
be identified with the Peripatetic philosopher Nicolaus. However, the mention of Averroes at the end of the
fragment does not seem to preclude Nicolaus’ authorship of it since such a mention might be seen as an
addition by the copyist. According to Ernest Renan, this fragment essentially corresponds to a short digres-
sion added by Averroes to his *Long Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book Lambda*. In any case,
Averroes surely knew and employed the DPA as a source, since he quotes some passages of its section on
*Metaphysics* in his own commentary, as shown by Hendrik Joan Drossaart Lulofs, *Nicolaus Damas-

4. After Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford, Claren-
don Press ; New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, one cannot neglect the possibility that monotheism
in late antiquity need not be Christian monotheism, and that a Trinitarian doctrine does not need in itself to
be a Christian Trinitarian doctrine. One may think in particular of the Chaldean theology whose interpreta-
tion by Damascius (*De primis principiis* III. 108-159) is discussed in Polymnia Athanassiadi, “The Chal-
dean Oracles : Theology and Theurgy”, in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, p. 149-184, especi-
ally 168-171. Nevertheless, insofar as we can judge from a cursory survey, it does not seem that this kind
of source could be crucial in explaining the most peculiar features of Nicolaus’ explanation of God’s Trin-
ity as opposed both to Aristotle’s theory of the first principles and to other better known sources for Chris-
tian theology as quoted above. As we are trying to show, what is original in Nicolaus is the attempt to rec-
oncile these two in a unified view.

If he was a Christian, the idea that God as Creator is an efficient cause fits quite naturally in his exegesis of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, as the introduction of the fragment indicates, in particular if one compares book 12, chapters 6-7, of this work.⁶

Concerning God as formal cause, this idea is less immediately evident in Aristotle. However in at least one passage of *Lambda*, his Prime Mover is said to be substance without matter, essence only (*Lambda* 1074a35, cf. 1071a36); this will allow Alexander of Aphrodisias (c. 200 AD) to regard it as pure, immaterial form, εἴδος ἀνεύ ὄλης (cf. e.g. Alexander’s *Quaestiones* I.1, p. 4.7-16, I.25, p. 39.9s.).⁷

As for the connexion of these different kinds of causes to each other, Aristotle’s *Physics* II.7 states that in living beings the efficient cause is identical (at least, i.e., specifically identical) with the formal cause, and moreover that this is identical (both specifically and numerically) with the final cause. Thus the doctrine of the fragment, even if unusual, seems a plausible one for a Peripatetic scholar, and it warrants some historical and philosophical analysis for its peculiar harmonizing character.

Nicolaus’ interpretation of Aristotle’s Prime Mover seems to have been combined with the fundamental Christian view about the second person of the Trinity. According to this view, the Christ is ὁ λόγος as found already in the first words of St. John’s Gospel (λόγος belongs to Aristotle’s standard terminology to indicate the formal cause, see *Metaph. passim*, e.g. 983a28).

Can the final cause be understood as representing the Spirit? Certainly the final cause might be identified as the soul, in accordance with Aristotle’s natural philosophy, and especially with his definition of soul as the final cause or perfection (ἐντελέχεια) of the living being in *De Anima* II. While the Holy Spirit is not identical with Aristotle’s soul, the idea of perfection is often connected to it by Church Fathers (e.g. John of Damascus⁹). Moreover, the concept of “final cause” can be regarded as an expression of God’s perfection in truth, knowledge, will and love as we will see in some later, namely Mediaeval sources for Christian theology.¹⁰

With this all, it must be noted that Nicolaus’ explanation of God’s Trinity implies a commitment by God to the world, namely three different ways of relating to it. On one hand, this distinguishes it from a purely theological Trinitarian doctrine, where

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6. Concerning creation, Stephen Menn pointed out to us that Nicolaus may have referred to Plato’s *Timaeus*, as suggested by the Latin fragment published by Hauréau (see n. 3, and see also the reference to Plato discussed below, n. 29).
7. See notes *ad loc.* in Silvia Fazzò’s contribution to this issue.
8. This shows that the unmoved Prime Mover can be and was interpreted as pure form, but that is not yet the same as its being the form of the world. This seems to be peculiar to Nicolaus’ fragment. However, Themistius says something more like this when he claims that the unmoved Prime Mover is the cause of the unity of the world and of each of the animals in it; for each thing, the goal is being one (see *THEMISTIUS, In Metaph. A*, chapter 10.22, trans. Brague = p. 39, l. 28-32, ed. Landauer; cf. also chapter 10.6, trans. Brague = p. 35, l. 31-36, ed. Landauer). We owe this helpful observation to Robert Sharples.
9. See e.g. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De fide orthodoxa*, PG 94, 828D, where it is said that the Spirit is τὸ τέλειον τῆς ὑποστάσεως (with Italian translation by V. Fazzo, GIOVANNI DAMASCENO, *La Fede ortodossa*, Roma, 1998.
10. See below.
the relation among the three Persons is at issue rather than their relation to the world. On the other hand, insofar as it can be regarded as an attempt to reduce the extramundane character of Aristotle’s theology, it falls in line with the doctrine of Providence which is peculiar to late antiquity’s Aristotelianism, from Alexander of Aphrodisias onward (200 AD ca.).

In the introduction of Nicolas’ fragment, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is mentioned (a reference which is much more likely to originate from Nicolaus himself than to be an independent addition by the Jewish author who quoted the fragment, Avner of Burgos). This shows a further common feature between Nicolaus and Alexander: both were claiming to explain the thought of Aristotle, while putting forward theories which were not really Aristotle’s theories, but rather merely compatible with them. This tendency, though a fairly common trend within the Aristotelian tradition, is worth mentioning here because it guarantees for the attribution of the fragment quoted below to a purely Aristotelian scholar, Nicolaus the Peripatetic, the author of the *DPA*. Indeed, Nicolaus the author of the fragment produced a peculiarly Peripatetic version of the Trinitarian dogma.

At the same time, his theory is quite obviously related to the highly controversial question of how the Holy Trinity is to be conceived.

It should be pointed out that the first well-known occurrence of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is probably the one found in Tertullian’s *Adversus Praxeum*, written in c. 210 AD. If this is a *terminus post quem*, the passage could not have been written by our Nicolaus before the 3rd century AD.

Firstly, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity does not become a theologic-philosophical doctrine in the terms of the classical tradition, and especially of theory of causes, before the first half of the 4th century, the era of the first great theological disputations, including the one concerning Arius’ heresy and its resolution at the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). This is another likely *terminus post quem* for Nicolaus’ application of Aristotle’s theory of causes to this controversial point.

Second, Nicolaus holds that the three causes are one and the same substance (apparently just one, and not three beings identical in substance). If, as already sug-

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11. We are especially grateful to Prof. Carlo Maria Mazzucchi for comments on this point.
12. See e.g. Atticus’ complaint in fr. 3 (fr. 49-96, p. 48-49 Des Places), according to which the gods of Aristotle have the world in front of them but they do not care about it, so that in Aristotle’s opinion there would be no place for providence at all. See also Epict., *Diss.* I 2.2-6. Alexander’s theory of providence can be regarded as an answer to such an objection; but nothing similar to Nicolaus’ trinitarian doctrine can be found in Alexander’s work.
14. An interesting parallel here comes from a treatise falsely ascribed to the Church Father Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 295-373 AD), but probably written in the same period. It holds one of the closest doctrines one can find in late antiquity to Nicolaus’ discussing the Trinity dogma in terms of “causes”. In the long dialogue *De sancta trinitate* (PG 28, 1129B), pseudo-Athanasius states that “the Father is cause of the Son, while the Son is the cause of the creation (of the world)” (ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ υἱοῦ αἰτίος ἔσται, ηγεί δὲ κτίσεως ὁ ὑιός), and that the Holy Spirit “has as (His) cause God, of which He is the Spirit” (αἰτίον δὲ ἔχει τὸν θεόν, οὗ πνεῦμα ἔστιν).
gested, the three causes are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, this means that both the Son and the Holy Spirit are one substance with the Father.

A theory dividing God into three different divinities was circulating, and subsequently disclaimed by the Catholic Church in the second half of the 3rd century (260). Around this time, a doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Son was apparently held by Paul of Samosata and condemned by the Antiochene Synod in 268.

Then in 325 AD, the Council in Nicaea, dealing chiefly (against Arius) with the Son, the second Person in the Trinity, established that the Son (and the Son only) is consubstantial with the Father. Only a few decades later, responding to further controversies concerning the status of the Spirit (which some Egyptian Christians regarded as made by God), Athanasius of Alexandria said that the Spirit as well is consubstantial with the Father. This view, though far from uncontroversial, was accepted by the Synod held in Alexandria (362 AD) under Athanasius’ leadership.

A similar view was accepted by the First Council in Constantinople (381 AD), in a form inspired by the teaching of Basilius of Caesarea (c. 330-378 AD). There, the doctrine that regarded the Holy Spirit as being a creation of the Father (held by the so-called Pneumatomachians) was decisively rejected as well.

But the idea of consubstantiality (which, notably, referred principally to the Son in relation to the Father) was then understood less as identity than as similarity in substance: like consubstantial, “of the similar nature” and concerning the Holy Spirit, Basilius rather insisted on its being consubstantial, “worth of the same worship”, with the Father and the Son. This is the doctrine expressed by the Symbolum Nicaenum-Constantinopolitanum, where the Son is consubstantiale Patri (consobstantiale το Πατρι), whereas the Spirit, though being cum Patre et Filio adorandum et conglorificandum (in the Greek: συν πατρι και υιω συμπροσκυνομενον και συνδοξαζομενον), is not said to be consubstantiale.

Now, even if it is difficult to find a neat terminus ante quem for Nicolaus’ theological position, if we accept that Nicolaus, not being an original theologian himself,
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is likely to have relied on those assumptions about the Trinity that held most authority by Eastern theologians of his time, then the strongest parallel is with the theories of Athanasius and at the Synod in Alexandria of 362. Such an assumption corresponds strikingly with the chronology based on Bar Hebraeus’ account, according to which Nicolaus floruit in the times of Julian, emperor in 361-363 AD.

More parallels to Nicolaus’ theory can be sought and found in theological texts, especially from the 12th c. onward. Some general references may be of interest and will be given below following the actual edition and translation of the relevant fragment from Nicolaus by Mauro Zonta.

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The Spanish Jewish philosopher Avner of Burgos (c. 1270-1345) wrote a number of books about philosophical and theological issues, some of which probably date from after c. 1320, when he converted to Christianity and defended his conversion through an opposition to another Spanish Jewish scholar, Isaac Polgar. Avner of Burgos’ reply to Isaac Polgar’s criticism is found in his work Teshuvot la-Meharef (Replies to the Critic, written in Hebrew and preserved in one manuscript only: Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Parmense 2440, folios 8r-66r). While examining the question of the relationships between the Creator (i.e. God) and the things created by Him, Avner attempts to demonstrate that such relationships are “substantial” ones. To support this, he quotes an interpretation of an Aristotelian doctrine, allegedly found in the Metaphysics, which he claims to have taken from Nicolaus (apparently, from books 2 or 3 of his DPA, which include an interpretation of the contents of Aristotle’s Metaphysics).

Alfonso de Valladolid (Avner of Burgos), Teshuvot la-Meharef, in ms. Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Parmense 2440, folio 20r, lines 8-16:

20. In the West, and especially in Rome, the situation was somehow different, inclining towards a strong monotheism, as opposed to Pagan cults. The Council of Rome (382 AD), in its declaration De trinitate et incarnatione, affirmed that the Holy Spirit has both the same power and the same substance as the Father and the Son (cum Patre et Filio unius potestatis [est] atque substantiae). Still, concerning the ἐκῶσιμον of the Spirit, this position was closer to Athanasius’ than to Basilius’ for whom the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are only one godness (Patris, Filii et Spiritus Sancti unam divinitatem... [esse]) in substance, although they are three distinct persons (tres personas... veras Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti). See Henricus DENZINGER, Enchiridion Symbolorum, § 59, 78-79 and 82.

21. As a matter of fact, a similar doctrine, according to which the three causes (efficient, formal, and final) can be reduced into only one cause, is found in ARISTOTLE, Physics, book 2, chapter 7, 198a23-29 (see above).

22. A Medieval Spanish version of this work, probably written by Avner himself and different in some respects from the Hebrew version, is found in only one manuscript (Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticanus latinus 6423, folios 41v-89v), which has been edited by Walter METTMANN: ALFONSO DE VALLADOLID (AVNER AUS BURGOS), Teshuvot la-Meharef, Spanische Fassung, Opladen, 1998. On page 32, lines 21-29 of Mettmann’s edition the above passage is translated as follows: “E aquellas son las que provó Aristótiles en la ‘Metafísica’ que Dios es las tres causas extremadas en uno a todo el mundo, que son la causa agente e la formal e la final. Et dellas escribió Nicolao, por nombre de Aristótiles, que Dios es uno en substancia e tres en dfinçoñ. Esto es que estas cossas que son una substancia, que es Dios bendicho. Quiero dezir: la manera con que es façetor del mundo, e la manera con que es
formá dél, e la manera con que es fin dél, non conviene a cuydar que fuessen tollidas dél, nin aun en el pensamiento. Nin aun quando cuydassemos qu’el mundo non era, e despues fue. Que si assi fuessese, non seria él Dios nin causa primiera”.

The Hebrew text transcribed above has been for the first time edited in Jonathan Leonard Héchtt, The Polemical Exchange Between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid according to Parma MS 2440 “Iggeret Teshuvat Akharos” and “Teshuvot la-Meharef”, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, New York University, 1993 (non vidimus). I have consulted the original Parma manuscript and transcribed the relevant passage above; however, it should be pointed out that two copies of this manuscript are found in the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts of the Jewish National and University Library of Jerusalem: the microfilm P 13444, and the CDRom n. 149.

24. The sense of the words “even when we consider that” is doubtful in the context.
26. Nicolaus’ DpA is quoted several times in Averroes’ Long Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics (see above, n.1), as is pointed out, among others, by Maurice Bouyges, the editor of the original Arabic text. None of these quotations is concerned with Christian doctrine. However, it is remarkable that the only two detailed references to a Christian doctrine in Averroes’ Long Commentary concerns the question of the divine Trinity. See Averroes’ commentary on book Lambda, 1072b27-28 (AVERROES, Taṣfir mā ba’d al-taḥāfuṭ, ed. Maurice Bouyges, Notice + 3 vols., Beyrouth, 1938-1952, p. 619, 1.15-p. 1 623, 1.16): “Therefore, the Christians were mistaken, in speaking of the Trinity in the substance, and as a consequence of this they could not escape from claiming that the God is One and Three since, when the substance (of God) is enumerated, that compound (substance) is one according to a (single) concept appended to the compound” (vol. III, p. 1620, 1.4-6). Here Averroes seems to insist on the logical contradiction of the Christian Trinitarian idea. After having explained his own idea, i.e. that God is an absolutely “unique concept” (ma‘nun wāḥid), he concludes that “the Trinity ascribed to God […] is a distinction in the mind, not in the existence, and it is something assumed by the (human) mind, like the things which are sometimes compound and sometimes united — not as the Christians claim, i.e. that they (= the three persons of the Trinity) are distinct concepts (ma‘ānī mutāgā‘a) which turn into one (thing)” (vol. III, p. 1623, 1.8-12). Finally, a critical reference to the Christian concept of God as being One as such, but many in definition is found in a short passage of another well-known work by Averroes, the Taḥāfuṭ al-taḥāfuṭ (Destruction of the De-
Greek and the Arabic texts have been lost, and there is only a very short Syriac summary of some parts of that work in a Cambridge manuscript as well as a number of quotations in Bar Hebraeus.\textsuperscript{27} this passage, albeit very short, can be useful for the reconstruction of the lost original text.

A relevant question to explore, to which we cannot now foresee the answer, is whether, when, and by whom, a connection between the Holy Trinity and the Aristotelian theory of the four causes was established among Christian theologians.

The question is a good one because the theory is rarely found in literature before what we may think is the age of Nicolaus, even if we suppose that he wrote his work (as according to Bar Hebraeus) in the 4th century AD.

We have already quoted some parallels in pseudo-Athanasius. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the 5th c., St. Augustine’s De trinitate almost ignores the connection between the idea of Trinity and the concept of “cause”.\textsuperscript{28}

If we look for a clear comparison of the nature of the Holy Trinity to three of the four Aristotelian causes in the Latin world, we can find it in a much later period, around c. 1100, in connection with the school of Chartres. Theodoricus of Chartres (d. 1150), brother of Bernard of Chartres, in his Tractatus de sex dierum operibus (written before 1140), compared the material cause to the four elements, created by God; the efficient cause, to the Father; the formal cause, to the Son; the final cause, to the Holy Spirit, which Theodoricus identified with the anima mundi.\textsuperscript{29} Some decades later, in the Polycraticus by John of Salisbury (c. 1170), the three Aristotelian concepts of efficient cause, formal cause, and final cause, are said to be identified by Plato (!). God’s strength, wisdom, and goodness, according to the author, correspond
to the three persons of the Holy Trinity.\textsuperscript{30} Accepting this, one has to assume that the Christ is identified with God’s wisdom, as well as with the Logos, already in Origenes.

A similar interpretation is apparently found in Albert the Great (1193-1280), who may have implicitly identified the Father with the efficient cause, His idea (i.e. the Logos, his Son) with the formal cause, His goodness (very probably, the Holy Spirit) with the final cause.\textsuperscript{31} Finally, it should be pointed out that John Duns Scotus (c. 1265-1308), in his \textit{De primo principio}, also defines God as the efficient cause, eminent (formal ?) cause, and final cause of all things.\textsuperscript{32}

What was the direct or indirect source of this idea? It is still difficult to believe that its diffusion in Europe after c. 1100 might have been the consequence of the diffusion of a Latin translation of Nicolaus’ work — after all, no positive trace of the existence of such translation has been found. And we must keep in mind that, Nicolaus, being more of a summarizer in philosophy than a theologian himself, is unlikely to be more than a secondary source for this intriguing and peculiar version of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Aristotelian terms. The question thus remains open.

\textsuperscript{30} See \textsc{John of Salisbury}, \textit{Polycraticus}, book 7, chapter 5 (\textsc{PL} 199, 645D), where he affirms that \textit{in Timaeo... manifeste videtur exprimere Trinitatem, quae Deus est, efficientem causam constituens in potentia Dei, in sapientia formalem, finalem in bonitate, “in the Timaeus... [Plato] indubitably appears to mention the Trinity which is God, postulating an efficient cause in the power of God, a formal cause in his wisdom, and a final cause in his goodness” (\textsc{John of Salisbury}, \textit{Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers}, trans. Joseph B. Pike, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1938, p. 229-230). A quotation of Plato on this point is striking, but it perhaps can be explained by the fact that John of Salisbury was fundamentally a Neoplatonist. For this doctrine, cf. the connection between \textit{divina podestate, somma sapienza} and \textit{primo amore} in Dante \textsc{Alighieri}, \textit{Inferno}, III, 5-6 (and see also Dante \textsc{Alighieri}, \textit{Convivio}, II, v 8, where the above three terms are more explicitly referred to the three persons of the Holy Trinity). We owe this parallel and some suggestions for this paragraph to Ilaria Ramelli, to whom we are particularly grateful, although she is not responsible for any mistake or misunderstanding in it.

\textsuperscript{31} See \textsc{Albert the Great}, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, pars prima, tr. 4, q. 20, membrum 2, quæstio incideris (\textsc{Ursum Deus sit forma vel materia omnium}), solutio, where he affirms that \textit{sicut dicit Bernardus in Canticis, Deus est esse omnium, non materiale, vel essentiale, sed causale. Et est causale secundum efficiens et formalem et finalem causam} (\textsc{Beatii Alberti, Operum, volumen XVII. Beati Alberti Magni... prima pars Summa theologicae}, ed. Petrus Jammy, Lugduni, 1651, p. 76b). However, here Albert does not explicitly connect this doctrine to the Trinity. (About Albert’s opinion on Trinity, see \textsc{Corey L. Barnes}, “Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on Person, Hypostasis, and Hypostatic Union”, \textit{Thomist}, 72 [2008], p. 107-146 (\textit{non vidimus}.) As a matter of fact, \textsc{Bernard of Clairvaux} wrote in his \textit{Sermones in Cantica canticorum}, Sermo IV, 4, \textsc{PL} 183, 798B : \textit{Sane esse omnium dixerim Deum, non quia illa sunt quod est ille, sed “quia ex ipso, et per ipsum, et in ipso sunt omnia”. Ecce est ergo omnium quae facta sunt ipsa factor eorum, sed causale, non materiale ; and it should be pointed out that the above passage stating that “everything is from God, \textit{via God}, and in God”, which seems to justify the doctrine of the Trinity as three causes, is taken from St. Paul’s \textit{Ephesians} to Romans, XI 36.

\textsuperscript{32} See \textsc{John Duns Scotus}, \textit{De primo principio}, 3 (p. 36 Müller), where he opens the chapter as follows : \textit{Domine Deus noster, qui te primum esse ac novissimum praedicasti, doce servum tuum, te esse primum efficiens et primum eminens finemque ultimum, ostendere ratione, quod certissima fide tenet. See ibidem, passim, e.g. p. 59 Müller : haec tria non possunt separari... unde istae tres primitates videntur exprimere tres rationes summae bonitatis, necessario concurrentes, quae sunt summa communicabilitas, summa amabilitas et summa integritas sive totalitas, bonum enim et perfectum idem. This reference — as it appears to be — to God as an efficient cause, as a final cause and as the highest “perfection”, and it is followed by a reference to Aristotle’s \textit{Metaphysics} (which is noteworthy in itself, although the exact meaning of the reference is it not completely clear).