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# Themistius and the Development of Averroes' Noetics

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## THEMISTIUS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AVERROES' NOETICS

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Ibn Rushd or Averroes was famously known in the Middle Ages of the Latin West as "the Commentator" for the most part due to the Latin translations of four of his five *Long Commentaries* on works by Aristotle. These four were the *Long Commentaries* on the *De Anima*, the *Physics*, the *De Caelo*, and the *Metaphysics*. His *Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* was translated into Latin in Renaissance times from Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> Each of these works contained a full text of Aristotle's work

<sup>1</sup> *De Anima: Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima Libros*, Crawford, F. S., ed. Cambridge, MA, 1953. Hereafter *Long Commentary* 1953. My translation of this work, Averroes (Ibn Rushd) of Cordoba, *Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, Taylor R.C., tr. & int., with Druart Th.-A. as subed., New Haven, CT, 2009, will be cited as *Long Commentary* tr. (2009). Arabic fragments of what seems to be an early version of the *Long Commentary on the De Anima* have been published by Ben Chehida, A., in "Iktishāf al-naṣṣ al-ʿarabī li-ahamm ajzāʾ al-Sharḥ al-kabīr li-Kitāb al-nafs taʿlīf Abī al-Walīd ibn Rushd" *Al-Ḥayāt al-Thaqāfiyya* (35) 1985, pp. 14-48; and also in part in a new edition in *L'original arabe du Grand Commentaire d'Averroès au De anima d'Aristote. Prémices d'édition*, Sirat, C., and Geoffroy, M., eds., Paris, 2005. The available Arabic fragments are reproduced in the notes to my translation. Another volume by Sirat and Geoffroy with the remainder of the fragments is forthcoming. *Physics*: The Latin *Long Commentary on the Physics* in the translation attributed to Michael Scot is found in the 1962 reprint of *Aristotelis Opera Cum Averrois Commentariis. Venetiis Apud Juntas, 1562-1574. v. 4*. Reprint Frankfurt am Main, 1962. On this and the possibility of another translation by Herman the German, see Schmiejā, H., "Secundam aliam translationem – Ein Beitrag zur arabisch-lateinischen Übersetzung des Großen Physikkommentars von Averroes" in *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition. Sources, Constitution and Reception of the Philosophy of Ibn Rushd (1126-1198). Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium Averroicum (Cologne, 1996)*, Endress, G., and Aertsen, J. A., eds., Leiden, 1999, pp. 316-336. Schmiejā is presently working on the edition of the *Long Commentary on the Physics* by Averroes. He has published recently *Averrois opera. Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis physicorum librum septimum* (Vindobonensis lat. 2334) Schmiejā H., ed., Paderborn, 2007. The original Arabic is not extant. Ruth Glasner has published a study of the Hebrew and Latin texts of Averroes' *Physics* commentaries and the development of his teachings on the principles of natural philosophy in Glasner R., *Averroes' Physics: A Turning Point in medieval natural Philosophy*, Oxford 2009. *De Caelo: Averrois Cordubensis commentum magnum super libro De celo et mundo Aristotelis*, Carmody, F. J., and Amzen, R., eds., Leuven, 2003. While an edition of the Arabic recently appeared (*Sharḥ al-Samāʾ wa-al-ʿālam lil-Ḥakīm Aristūṭālīs, Abū*

accompanied by Averroes's close, detailed, and oftentimes very expansive commentary based on sources from the Greek and Arabic philosophical traditions and his own philosophical acumen. While writings by Averroes were known in the Arabic tradition, they did not give rise to a philosophical school or tradition in the Islamic world.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is no understatement to say that his influence through these works and some others was wide and deep among European thinkers of the Middle Ages and later, conveying a powerful and threatening philosophical rationalism.<sup>3</sup> Working

*al-Walīd ibn Rushd*, A. Jum'ah, A., ed., Tunis, 2002), the critical edition of Endress is still in process. In 1994 Endress published *Commentary on Aristotle's Book on the Heaven and the Universe*, by *Ibn Rushd*, facsimile of the unique Tunis manuscript, prepared by Gerhard Endress. Frankfurt am Main, 1994. *Metaphysics*: The Arabic is available in *Averroës Tafsīr mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at* in 4 v., Bouyges, M., ed., Beirut, 1938-1952. The Latin translation is being edited by Dag Nikolaus Hasse but this text (as well as most of his works translated into Latin) is at present most easily available in the reprint of the *Giunta Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis et epitome in Aristotelis Opera Cum Averrois Commentariis. Venetiis Apud Juntas*, 1562-1574, v. 8. Reprint Frankfurt am Main, 1962. An English translation of book *Lām / Lambda* is found in Genequand, Ch., *Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lām* (Islamic Philosophy and Theology. Texts and Studies 1), Leiden, 1984. There is also an incomplete French translation of this book: *Averroës. Grand Commentaire de la Métaphysique d'Aristote* (Tafsīr mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at). *Livre lām-lambda*, Martin, A., tr. (Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et de Lettres de l'Université de Liège, fasc. 234), Paris, 1984. Some translations of other parts of this work have been published in Bauloye, L., "Averroës. Grand commentaire de la Métaphysique d'Aristote, Z1 et Z2. Introduction, traduction et commentaire" in *Bulletin d'études orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas* (49) 1997, pp. 53-73; and *Averroës. Grand commentaire (Tafsīr) de la Métaphysique. Livre Bêta. Précédé de "Averroës et les apories de la Métaphysique d'Aristote"*, Paris, 2002. There is also a French translation of book *Zāy (Zêta): Étude du livre Zāy (Dzêta) de la "Métaphysique" d'Aristote dans sa version arabe et son commentaire par Averroës*, Elsakhawi, A., tr., Villeneuve d'Ascq, France, 2001. *Posterior Analytics*: The *Long Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, partially extant in Arabic, was translated during the Renaissance from Hebrew into Latin in two complete versions by Abram de Balme and Jo. Francisco Burana and one incomplete version by Jacob Mantino. *Aristotelis Opera Cum Averrois Commentariis. Venetiis Apud Juntas*, 1562-1574, v. 1 pt. 2a. Reprint Minerva: Frankfurt am Main, 1962. For the extant Arabic, see *Ibn Rushd. Sharḥ al-Burhān li-Arīṣṭū wa-Talkhīṣ al-Burhān* (*Ibn Rushd. Grand Commentaire et Paraphrase des Seconds Analytiques d'Aristote*), ed., Badawi, 'A., Kuwayt, 1984. The most valuable bibliography of available primary and secondary literature is that of David Wirmer et al. at the Thomas Institut in Cologne, an ongoing work with periodic updates. See <http://www.dare.uni-koeln.de>

<sup>2</sup> For an account of his friends, followers and students, see Puig Montada, J., "Materials on Averroes's Circle", in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (51) 1992, pp. 241-260. Also see his "El pensamiento de Averroes en su contexto personal y social" in *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos* (38) 1989-1990, pp. 307-324; and "Averroes, vida, ambiente y persecución de un filósofo" in *Revista española de filosofía medieval* (6) 1999, pp. 217-232.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the thought of Averroes, see Taylor, R. C., "Averroes: Religious Dialectic and Aristotelian Philosophical Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to*

with the texts of an Aristotle who had been reshaped by Greek Neoplatonic thinkers and the Arabic tradition, Averroes set out a philosophical monotheism which was claimed, used, and attacked in varying ways and degrees. Yet, however important and penetrating the rationalism of Averroes in his translated works may have been, it was not universally accepted even if it was always a player in discussions of psychology, cosmology, natural philosophy, philosophy of science, and metaphysics. The thinkers of Medieval Christian Europe were shocked by his views (shared with Aristotle) that the world is eternal, that the motion of this world is caused by the Divine as final cause, not as creative efficient cause and not as a matter of divine will, and that human happiness could in principle be attained in the present life. Nevertheless, the most controversial doctrine for Medieval Christian Europeans was the account of human intellect in the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, the infamous account which held that human intellectual understanding takes place only by means of two unique transcendent entities called Agent Intellect and Material Intellect and shared by all human beings.

The notion that all human intellectual understanding comes about in some way by means of a single transcendent Agent Intellect was inherited by the Arabic tradition from Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and others of the Greek tradition.<sup>4</sup> This notion is present in some form in al-Kindī<sup>5</sup> and was fully adopted by the 10th century Baghdad philosopher al-Fārābī,<sup>6</sup>

*Arabic Philosophy*, Adamson, P., and Taylor, R. C., eds., Cambridge, 2005, pp. 180-200. Hereafter CCAP.

<sup>4</sup> On the Greek tradition, see Blumenthal, H. J., *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: interpretations of the De Anima*, London, 1996; and the collection of texts translated in the section on "Thought" in Sorabji, R., *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200-600 AD. A Sourcebook. Volume 1. Psychology*, London, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of al-Kindī's treatise, *On the Intellect*, see Adamson, P., *Al-Kindī*, Oxford, 2007, pp. 118-127.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding al-Fārābī, see Taylor, R. C., "Abstraction in al-Fārābī" in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (80) 2006, pp. 151-168. For a particularly interesting and challenging account of al-Fārābī, see Vallat, Ph., *Farabi et l'École d'Alexandrie. Des prémisses de la connaissance à la philosophie politique*, Paris, 2004. Vallat's commissioned contribution on al-Fārābī to the current CNRS Project, "Noétique et théorie de la connaissance dans la philosophie arabe des IX<sup>e</sup> -XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles" directed by M. Sebti and D. De Smet in Paris, will likely be an important contribution to the study of al-Fārābī on intellect. M. Geoffroy argues that al-Fārābī likely did not work directly from the *De Anima* of Aristotle in "La tradition arabe du Περὶ τοῦ d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise et les origines de la théorie farabienne des quatre degrés de l'intellect" in *Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodizia nella tradizione araba*, D'Ancona, C., and Serra, G., eds., (Subsidia Mediaevalia Patavina 3), Padova, 2002, pp. 191-231. For the understanding of al-Fārābī by Averroes, see Taylor, R. C., "The Agent Intellect as 'form for us' and Averroes' Critique of al-Fārābī" in *Topicos* (Universidad Panamericana, Mexico City) (29)



by the Persian Ibn Sīnā or Avicenna,<sup>7</sup> by the Andalusian Ibn Bājja or Avempace,<sup>8</sup> and by Averroes himself, though each of these thinkers conceived the nature and function of the Agent Intellect differently in their epistemologies.<sup>9</sup> What is more, each at some time subscribed to the notion that every human being possesses an individual human material or receptive intellect which in some fashion receives intelligibles thanks to the Agent Intellect. This includes Averroes who held this view in both his early *Short Commentary on the De Anima*<sup>10</sup> and also in his later

2005, pp. 29-51, reprinted with corrections in *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics* (5) 2005, pp. 18-32.

<sup>7</sup> The traditional emanationist view of Avicenna well represented by Davidson, H., *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, Oxford, 1992, is criticized in Gutas, D., "Intuition and Thinking: The Evolving Structure of Avicenna's Epistemology" in *Aspects of Avicenna*, Princeton, 2001 (reprinted from *Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. IX), Wisnovsky, R., ed., pp. 1-38; and in Hasse, D. N., "Avicenna on Abstraction", *ibid.*, pp. 39-72. An analysis taking into account both views is provided in McGinnis, J., "Making Abstraction Less Abstract: The Logical, Psychological and Metaphysical Dimensions of Avicenna's Theory of Abstraction" in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (80) 2006, pp. 169-183. For a valuable short account of epistemological issues in the Arabic tradition, see Black, D. L., "Psychology: Soul and Intellect" in *CCAP*, pp. 308-326. It is likely that a more valuable approach to Avicenna on this issue would involve a distinction between two movements of the soul, (i) apprehension through an abstractive account founded on sense perception as a preparation for (ii) the rational soul's conjoining with the intelligibles in act present in the Agent Intellect. This would be in accord with Porphyrian and late Neoplatonic accounts which retain forms of both a (purportedly) Aristotelian activity of abstraction and a Platonic notion of recollection. Also see the concluding remarks in D'Ancona, C., in "Degrees of Abstraction in Avicenna. How to Combine Aristotle's *De Anima* and the *Enneads*" in *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, Knuuttila, S., and Kärkkäinen, P., eds., pp. 45-71, Dordrecht: Springer, 2008. I intend to address this issue in detail elsewhere.

<sup>8</sup> See Pines, S., "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides" in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, Twersky, I., ed., Cambridge, MA, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 82-109. Reprinted in *Collected Works of Shlomo Pines*, v. 5, Harvey, W. Z., and Idel, M., eds., pp. 404-431. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997. See Altmann, A., "Ibn Bajja on Man's Ultimate Felicity" in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, Jerusalem, 1965, v.1, pp. 47-87. Also see Puig Montada, J., "Philosophy in Andalusia: Ibn Bajja and Ibn Tufayl" in *CCAP*, pp. 155-179, in particular pp. 161-164; and "Ibn Bajja" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Zalta, E. N., ed., <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-Bajja/>. (First published Fri 28 Sep, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See Davidson (1992) for a comprehensive account. For a short account, see Black in *CCAP*, pp. 317-322.

<sup>10</sup> *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Nafs*, El-Ahwani, A. F., ed., Cairo, 1950. Hereafter *Short Commentary* (1950). Although the editor gives it the title *Talkhīṣ* which denotes a *Middle Commentary*, this is Averroes's *Short Commentary on the De Anima*. This edition contains the original version with Averroes' summary of Ibn Bājja's *Risālat Ittiṣāl al-ʿaql bi-l-insān* (*Treatise on the Conjoining of the Intellect with Man*) omitted in *Epitome de Anima*, Gómez Nogales, S., ed., Madrid, 1985. Hereafter *Short Commentary* (1985).

*Middle Commentary on the De Anima*,<sup>11</sup> both arguably completed prior to the composition of the late final version of his *Long Commentary*.<sup>12</sup> In these two earlier works each human being has a personal material intellect receptive of intelligibles by virtue of which that human being is deemed rational. In the *Short Commentary*, the material intellect is said to be a disposition of the intelligible forms of the imagination.<sup>13</sup> In the

This latter edition, which contains the later version of the *Short Commentary* with Averroes' revisions and reference to his *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, is translated in *La Psicología de Averroes. Comentario al libro sobre el alma de Aristóteles*, Gómez Nogales, S., tr., Madrid, 1987. Hereafter *Short Commentary* (1987). This translation renders texts excised late by Averroes but found in *Short Commentary* (1950) though not printed in *Short Commentary* (1985). The *Short Commentary on the De Anima* is also published in *Rasā'il Ibn Rushd*, Hyderabad, 1947. Regarding the problems of the editions of the *Short Commentary*, see al-'Alawī, J., *al-Matn al-Rushdī*, Casablanca, 1986, p. 53, n. 8, and his "The Philosophy of Ibn Rushd: The Evolution of the Problem of the Intellect in the Works of Ibn Rushd: From Philological Examination to Philosophical Analysis" in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, Jayyusi, S. Kh., ed., Leiden-New York-Koln, 1992, pp. 804-829, in particular, pp. 807-811. Selections from the translation of the *Short Commentary* by Gómez Nogales are also published in *Sobre el Intelecto. Abū-l-Walīd Ibn Rushd (Averroes)*, Lorca, A. M., ed. and tr., Madrid, 2004. For an overview of the contents of the *Short Commentary*, see Ivry, A. L., "Averroes' *Short Commentary* on Aristotle's *De anima*" in *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione filosofica medievale* (8) 1997, pp. 511-549.

<sup>11</sup> For this text, see Averroes. *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima. A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation, Notes and Introduction*, Ivry, A. L., ed. and tr., Provo, Utah, 2002. Hereafter *Middle Commentary* (2002).

<sup>12</sup> Dating the works of Averroes is very difficult business in part because in many cases he returned to earlier works to insert changes, corrections and remarks. Roughly put, the *Short Commentary on the De Anima* was probably composed around 1158-1160, the *Middle Commentary* perhaps around 1174-1180, and the *Long Commentary* completed likely around 1186. Comments by Averroes in the Hebrew version of his *Long Commentary on the Physics* found by Ruth Glasner indicate that the *Long Commentary on the De Anima* was the first of the *Long Commentaries* completed. See Glasner, R., Review of Averroes. *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima. A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation, Notes and Introduction*, Alfred L. Ivry, in *Aestimatio* (1) 2004, pp. 57-61, in particular pp. 58-59. Evidence presently available seems to indicate the likelihood that Averroes drew upon an early version of the *Long Commentary* for a number of texts of his *Middle Commentary*. Identical texts in these two works are identified at *Long Commentary* tr. (2009) introduction, n. 41, pp. XXIX-XXX. Sirat and Geoffroy in their work cited in note 1 argue for several early versions of the *Long Commentary* or parts of it.

<sup>13</sup> In his *Treatise on the Conjoining of the Intellect with Man*, Ibn Bājjah writes that, in the case of the intelligibles in the material intellect, that which is understood is not at all material nor spiritual but rather "it is a form having as its matter the intermediate spiritual forms of the imagination (هي صورة هيولاء الصور الروحانية الخيالية المتوسطة)." Ibn Bājjah, *Risālat Ittiṣāl al-'aql bi-l-insān*, Palacios, M. A., ed. and tr., in "Tratado de Avempace sobre la Unión del Intelecto con el Hombre", *al-Andalus* (7) 1942, pp. 1-47: see Arabic, p. 13, Spanish, p. 30; *Rasā'il Ibn Bājjah al-Ilāhīyah (Ibn Bājjah (Avempace). Opera Metaphysica)*, Fakhry, M., ed., Beirut, 1968, pp. 153-173, see p. 160; French translation

*Middle Commentary* he rejected that as tying this necessarily immaterial receptive power too closely to the body or a power of body. Instead, in the *Middle Commentary* Averroes made the material intellect a disposition receptive of intelligibles by conceiving it as a disposition of the soul, as it were, standing off immaterially at a distance from composition with the body.<sup>14</sup> In both of these works the material intellect is a disposition belonging to a human individual – not something shared – and the individuation and the existence of the material intellect is dependent upon the human soul. Although Averroes does not raise the issue of individual immortality in these early works, the material intellect's complete dependence on the bodily human soul for individuation implies that this personal human intellect perishes with the death of the body of which the soul is the actuality. In the *Long Commentary* Averroes also has no room for individual personal immortality for particular human beings, though

by Lagardère, V., in "L'Épître d'Ibn Bājjā sur la conjonction de l'intellect avec l'esprit humain" *Revue des Études Islamiques* (49) 1981, pp. 175-196, see p. 185. Averroes follows Ibn Bājjā in the *Short Commentary* when he describes the material intellect as "the disposition which is in the forms of the imagination for receiving the intelligibles" (فأذن الاستعداد الذي في الصور الخيالية لقبول المعقولات هو العقل الهولاني الأول). *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 86; (1985), p. 124; (1987), p. 209. I read العقل in *Short Commentary* (1985) as a typographical error for العقل. Simply put, in his late doctrine Averroes held for a single, shared transcendent material intellect, but he held for a plurality of individual material intellects, one for each human knower, in the *Short Commentary* and in the *Middle Commentary*.

<sup>14</sup> "For, this faculty, which is called the material intellect, if it is to think all things – that is, receive the forms of all things – cannot be mixed with any one form; that is, it cannot be mixed with the subject in which it is found, as the other material faculties are. (278) If the rational faculty were mixed with any form, then one of two things would have to occur: either the form of the subject with which it was mixed would impede the forms this faculty would receive, or it would change them – that is, it would change the form being received. Were this so, the forms of things would not exist in the intellect as they really are – that is, the forms existing in the intellect would be changed into forms different from the actual forms. If, therefore, the nature of the intellect is to receive the forms of things which have retained their natures, it is necessary that it be a faculty unmixed with any form whatsoever." *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 109. "It has thus been explained that the material intellect is something composed of the disposition found in us and of an intellect conjoined to this disposition. As conjoined to the disposition, it is a disposed intellect, not an intellect in act; though, as not conjoined to this disposition, it is an intellect in act; while, in itself, this intellect is the Agent Intellect, the existence of which will be shown later. As conjoined to this disposition, it is necessarily an intellect in potentiality which cannot think itself but which can think other than itself (that is, material things), while, as not conjoined to the disposition, it is necessarily an intellect in act which thinks itself and not that which is here (that is, it does not think material things)." *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112. Also see the text cited at note 53 below. Here and throughout this paper I modify Ivry's translation by using the term 'material intellect' for العقل الهولاني in lieu of his 'hylic intellect.'



the ontologies of intelligibles in act and immaterially separate material intellect are completely different from what is found in the other two commentaries.<sup>15</sup>

In preparing all three of his commentaries on the *De Anima*, Averroes had at hand the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by the late Greek commentator Themistius.<sup>16</sup> In his analyses in the *Short* and *Middle Commentaries* on the *De Anima* Averroes made use of this work sometimes directly

<sup>15</sup> See Taylor, R. C., "Personal Immortality in Averroes' Mature Philosophical Psychology" in *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* (9) 1998, pp. 87-110; and "Intelligibles in act in Averroes" in *Averroès et les averroïsmes juif et latin. Actes du colloque tenu à Paris, 16-18 juin 2005*, Brenet, J.-B., ed., Turnhout, 2007, pp. 111-140.

<sup>16</sup> Themistius, *In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, Heinze, R., ed., Berlin, G. Reimeri, 1899, [Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca, 5.3]. An Arabic Translation of Themistius' Commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, Lyons, M. C., ed., Columbia, South Carolina, and Oxford, England, 1973. This Arabic text, based on an incomplete manuscript, is missing Greek pp. 2-22 and some other passages. Themistius, *On Aristotle's On the Soul*, Todd, R. B., tr., Ithaca, N.Y., 1996. Todd also translated selections from the Greek text in *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect*, Schroeder, F. M., and Todd, R. B., tr., Toronto, 1990. Themistius is argued to have been influenced by Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism in his *Paraphrase of the De Anima* in Verbeke, G., "Thémistius et le 'De unitate intellectus' de S. Thomas" in Thémistius, *Commentaire sur le Traité de l'âme d'Aristote. Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke. Édition critique et étude sur l'utilisation du commentaire dans l'œuvre de saint Thomas*, Verbeke, G., ed., Leiden, 1973, pp. XL ff; Ballériaux, O., "Thémistius et l'exégèse de la noétique aristotélicienne" in *Revue de philosophie ancienne* (7) 1989, pp. 199-233; Falcon, A. "Commentators on Aristotle" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2005 Edition), Zalta, E. N., ed., URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2005/entries/aristotle-commentators/>>; and seemingly de Libera, A., in his *L'Unité de l'intellect de Thomas d'Aquin. Commentaire du De unitate intellectus contra averroistas de Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris, 2004, pp. 490 ff. A more thoroughly Aristotelian interpretation is set forth by Blumenthal, H. J., in "Themistius, the Last Peripatetic Commentator on Aristotle?", in *Arkouros. Hellenic Studies presented to Bernard M. W. Knox on the occasion of his 65th birthday*, Bowersock, G. W., Burkert, W., and Putnam, M. C. J., eds., Berlin and New York, 1979, pp. 391-400. In a revised version of this article published with the same title in *Aristotle Transformed: the Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, Sorabji, R., ed. and tr., Ithaca, N.Y., 1990, Blumenthal adds discussion of E. P. Mahoney on the purported Neoplatonism of Themistius. There Blumenthal concludes that "such Neoplatonic influence as there may have been was marginal in matters of doctrine, and only a little greater in features of language." p. 121. Cf. Mahoney, E. P., "Themistius and the agent intellect in James of Viterbo and other thirteenth-century philosophers" in *Augustiniana* (23) 1973, pp. 423-67; and "Neoplatonism, the Greek Commentators, and Renaissance Aristotelianism" in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought* (Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern 3), O'Meara, D. J., ed., Albany NY, 1982, pp. 169-77 and pp. 264-82. For other related articles by Mahoney, see Blumenthal 1990, n. 25. I am now inclined to find some influence from the Platonic tradition in the assertion by Themistius that the forms are precontained in the transcendent Productive / Agent Intellect, though on the whole his account seems significantly more Aristotelian than Platonic. See Themistius, Greek (1899), p. 103.30-32 cited with the Arabic below at note 45.



citing Themistius and at other times drawing inspiration without citation. Careful examination of the three *Commentaries* on the *De Anima* gives clear evidence that Averroes made three distinct studies of the *Paraphrase* by Themistius in preparing the *Commentaries*.<sup>17</sup> In the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, however, it is clear that he worked much more closely with the text of Themistius than ever before and that he was fully engaged with it in a critical fashion. And it is that critical engagement with the *Paraphrase on the De Anima* by Themistius which played the key role in Averroes's development of his new doctrine of the unique, separate yet shared Material Intellect in the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, a doctrine which caused great and recurring controversy in Latin Europe.<sup>18</sup>

In what follows here I locate and expound two key epistemological principles which Averroes encountered in his late reading of the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by Themistius and which he adapted idiosyncratically as essential features in his own so-called 'Aristotelian' account of the nature of human intellectual understanding. However, despite their appearance in the context of the arguments of Averroes, at least one and perhaps both of these principles might be understood as not properly Aristotelian but rather what we might call central doctrines of the Platonic tradition: (1) the unity of known intelligibles in a single transcendent encompassing thesaurus, the Material Intellect, and (2) the formal, intrinsic participation by all human knowers in a single transcendent entity, the

<sup>17</sup> This is discussed in *Long Commentary* tr. (2009), introduction, pp. XXIX-XXX.

<sup>18</sup> No adequate comprehensive overview of Averroism is available today. Cruz Hernández, M., *Abū-l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Vida, Obra, Pensamiento, Influencia* 2nd ed., Córdoba, 1997, provides some brief essays on Averroism. The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at <http://plato.stanford.edu/> has several valuable contributions on the influence of Averroes on the Hebrew tradition by M. Zonta, S. Pessin and J. T. Robinson. Also see Harvey, S., "Philosophy in southern France: Controversy over philosophical study and the influence of Averroes upon Jewish thought" in the *Cambridge Companion to Jewish Philosophy*, Frank, D. H., and Leaman, O. eds., Cambridge, 2003, pp. 281-303, and his chapter "Islamic philosophy and Jewish philosophy" in *CCAP*, pp. 349-369, are valuable overviews. Many individual studies of the work of Siger of Brabant, Boethius of Dacia and other thinkers considered by some to be Latin Averroists have been published but new conceptual work remains to be done on precisely what constitutes Latin Averroism in its possibly many forms and influences. Individual studies are far too numerous to detail here so I just mention a few: *Averroès et les averroïsmes juif et latin. Actes du colloque tenu à Paris, 16-18 juin 2005* (cited in nt. 15); Brenet, J.-B., *Transferts du sujet. La noétique d'Averroès selon Jean de Jandun*, Paris, 2003; and *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition* cited in nt. 1, are just three recent contributions. For more studies, see the valuable online bibliography of Averroes and Averroism by David Wimer cited in nt. 1.

Agent Intellect. I conclude with consideration of whether these principles in the thought of Averroes on intellect are indeed suitably called Platonic or might better be called principles of an Aristotelian form of participation.

# 1. Intellect in Averroes' *Short and Middle Commentaries on the De Anima*: One Transcendent Shared Agent Intellect and a Plurality of Individual Human Material Intellects

## 1.1. *The Short Commentary on the De Anima*

Averroes' first substantial account on the nature of the intellect in human beings is found in his *Short Commentary on the De Anima*, also known as his *Epitome* (*mukhtaṣar*). Although relevant remarks are found in other sections of that work, it is in chapter 8 on the theoretical or rational power (*al-naẓarī*) and in various remarks in earlier chapters that Averroes addresses the understanding that theoretical intelligibles (*al-maʿqūlāt al-naẓarīyah*) must be both separate intelligibles in act – in some fashion – and also received in individual human knowers. This knowing reception of intelligibles on the part of human beings is their realization or perfection of the ultimate human disposition (*ʿalā istiʿdādihi al-akhīrī*) for the apprehension of intelligibles in act.<sup>19</sup>

Intelligibles come to exist in the soul by way of the impressions (*āthār*) of sensibles which move or affect the external senses, which then move the common sense, which in turn moves the power of imagination.<sup>20</sup> These impressions in the case of each of the subjects into which they are received are to be regarded as the perfection and act of the power into which they are received, which is also the case for the forms which exist by discursive thought and discovery<sup>21</sup> received by way of experience of the world into the external and internal senses as intentions (*maʿānin*). The reception into the senses and internal powers at each step becomes more and more spiritual or less and less material. However, while imagination is common to all animals,<sup>22</sup> the nature of this power of imagination

<sup>19</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), pp. 72-73; (1985), pp. 106-107; (1987), pp. 195-196.

<sup>20</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), pp. 63-64; (1985), pp. 87-88; (1987), pp. 177-178.

<sup>21</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 71.5 ff.; (1985), p. 102.5 ff.; (1987), pp. 189-190.

<sup>22</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), pp. 64-65; (1985), pp. 88-89; (1987), pp. 178-179.

in human beings transcends what it is in other animals since it in some way functions as the subject for the universal and as receptive of intelligibles.<sup>23</sup> In this case, when intentions are received into the imagination no contrary must be displaced since "The imaginative soul is distinguished by the fact that it does not need an organic instrument for its activity."<sup>24</sup> Though now perfected or completed at a higher more spiritual and less material level, these images are still conceived as individual and material<sup>25</sup> and in the individual's imagination are individuated by the subjects into which they are received as "multiplied with the multiplication of their subjects and numbered by their enumeration."<sup>26</sup> Hence, while these imagined intentiones garnered from the world give rise to intelligibles and are the grounds and causes for the truth (*ṣādiq*) of the intelligibles in act coming about in the mind,<sup>27</sup> they are nevertheless still at the level of particularity and materiality and so cannot yet be properly considered the intelligibles in act which function in the mind as universals. Indicating that conceiving by imagination differs from intellectual conception, Averroes writes earlier that, "Intellectual conceptualization is the freeing of the universal intention from matter, not insofar as it has an individual and material relation in its substance. Rather, if that [latter] were necessarily so, then this would entail that this is one of the properties of the universal, that is, it would be numbered by the number of individuals and it would have to have a material relation."<sup>28</sup> Hence, since the apprehension of intentions is either as particular or universal<sup>29</sup> with particular apprehension taking place in a material subject and with universal or intellectual apprehension taking place only in a way completely

<sup>23</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), pp. 70-71; (1985), pp. 100-101; (1987), pp. 189-190. Cf. *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 68; (1985), pp. 90-91; (1987), pp. 185-186, where he says it is not in the teleology of other animals to have other powers higher than sense and imagination.

<sup>24</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 74.9-10; (1985), p. 108.14-15; (1987), p. 197. ويخص النفس المتخيلة أنها لا يحتاج في فعلها إلى آلة آلية

<sup>25</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 61.8; (1985), p. 84.11; (1987), pp. 174-175: المتخيلات إنما نتصورها من حيث هي شخصية وهيولانية

<sup>26</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 80.13; (1985), p. 116.9; (1987), p. 203: أنها متكررة بتكثر الموضوعات ومتعددة بتعددتها

<sup>27</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 80; (1985), pp. 116-117; (1987), p. 203.

<sup>28</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 61.11-14; (1985), pp. 84.13-85.2; (1987), p. 175: وأما التصور العقلي فهو تجريد المعنى الكلي من الهيولي، لا من حيث له نسبة شخصية هيولانية في جوهره، بل إن كان ولا بد، فعلى أن ذلك لاحق من لواحق الكلي، أعني أن يتعدد بتعدد الأشخاص، وأن توجد له

نسبة هيولانية

<sup>29</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 67.10-11; (1985), p. 94.4; (1987), p. 184: المعاني المدركة صنفان: إما كلي وإما شخصي. Note that (1950) misprints p. 67 as p. 71.

free of matter, the understanding of the nature of the subject in which intelligibles in act exist is of essential importance.

In human beings, there are activities of conceptualization and assent<sup>30</sup> by which abstraction and judgment take place. What are apprehended in some way in human knowing are forms insofar as these are intelligible, universal, and free from matter. This abstraction, also described by the phrase, "intellectual conceptualization" (*at-taṣawwur bi-l-<sup>c</sup>aql*),

is the freeing of the forms from matter. When the forms are freed from matter individual multiplicity is eliminated from them. It is not necessary that the elimination of individual material multiplicity be the elimination of multiplicity altogether, for perhaps there can remain here a multiplicity in a way, although in a way such that the forms are freed from determinate multiplicity (*min kathratin maḥdūdatin*) and are judged as an indeterminate multiplicity (*‘alā kathratin ghaira mutanāhiyatin*). It may be found that this act belongs to an immaterial power because, if it is necessary that the apprehension of separate forms be indeterminate, it is necessary that the apprehension of material forms have determinateness and the judgment of them involve determinateness. If the judgment of material forms involves determinateness, then what is a judgment of indeterminateness? For it is necessarily immaterial since the judgment of the thing is an apprehension of it or by way of the nature belonging to what apprehends it. From this it appears – upon my life! – that this power in us is immaterial....<sup>31</sup>

Forms, however, are one insofar as they are intelligible, but multiplied insofar as they are individual and material.<sup>32</sup> Now, since an intelligible

<sup>30</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 68.5-6; (1985), p. 95.3-4; (1987), p. 185: والفعل الأول: من أفعال هذه القوة يسمى تصورا، والثاني تصديقا

<sup>31</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), pp. 76.12-77.4; (1985), pp. 111.11-112.6; (1987), p. 199: وذلك أن التصور بالعقل إنما هو تجريد الصور من الهيولى. وإذا تجردت الصور من الهيولى ارتفعت عنها الكثرة الشخصية. وليس يلزم عن ارتفاع الكثرة الشخصية الهيولانية ارتفاع الكثرة أصلا (عنها). فإنه لعله يمكن أن تبقى هناك كثرة بوجه ما، لكن من جهة أنها تجرد الصور من كثرة محدودة وتحكم حكما على كثرة غير متناهية، فقد يجب أن يكون هذا الفعل لقوة غير هيولانية. لأنه إن كان واجبا أن يكون إدراك الصور المفارقة لغير متناه، وجب أن يكون إدراك الصور الهيولانية لمتناه، وحكمها على متناه. وإذا كان حكم الصور الهيولانية على متناه فما هو حكم على غير متناه، فهو ضرورة غير هيولاني، إذ كان الحكم على الشيء إدراك له، أو من قبل طبيعة مدركة له. فمن هذا يظهر – لعمري – أن هذه القوة التي فينا غير هيولانية.

Note that I follow *Short Commentary* (1950) which has التصور بالعقل rather than التصور found in *Short Commentary* (1985). The (1987) Spanish translation agrees with the text of *Short Commentary* (1950).

<sup>32</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 75.13-17; (1985), p. 110.7-11; (1987), p. 198:

ف نقول إنه قد يظهر من أمر وجود صور المعقولات للإنسان أنها فيه على نحو مبين لوجود سائر الصور النفسانية فيه، إذ كانت هذه الصور وجودها في موضوعها المشار إليه غير وجودها المعقول، وذلك أنها واحدة من حيث هي معقولة، ومتكثرة من حيث هي شخصية وفي هيولى



is formed by abstraction from the content of experience,<sup>33</sup> the intelligible in act must be separate from matter and must also be unlimited insofar as it is universal. For this apprehension and conceptualization of intelligibles to take place in act, there must be a receptive matter as subject for intelligibles in act, the material intellect. This matter, however, is only a disposition (*isti'dād*) which makes possible the abstraction of intelligibles and as such must be only equivocally material:<sup>34</sup> it must be in potency and receptive of the intelligibles in a way unlike the receptivity of matter. Further, this disposition must itself have a subject which cannot be body because intelligibles are not material as are forms in body; yet that subject cannot be intellect because it is something in potency, not in act as is the case for intellect. Thus the subject for the disposition equivocally called material intellect is the human soul and among its powers nothing is more suitable as subject than the forms of the imagination since the material intellect exists through their existence and ceases with their ceasing. Averroes recounts these considerations when he writes,

Since it has been made evident that these intelligibles are generated, it is necessary that there be a disposition which precedes them. And since the disposition is something which is not separate, it is necessary that it exist in a subject. It is not possible for this subject to be a body according to what has been made evident regarding these intelligibles not being material in the way in which bodily forms are material. It is also not possible that it be an intellect, since it is something in potency, for there is not anything in it in act of that for which it is a potency. Since this is so, then the subject for this disposition must be a soul. And there is nothing evident here closer to being the subject of these intelligibles among the powers of the soul than the forms of the imagination. Since it has been

"We say that it is perhaps evident from the issue of the existence of the forms of the intelligibles belonging to human beings that they are in [human beings] in a way different from the existence of the rest of the spiritual forms in [human beings], since the existence of these forms in their determinate particular subject is different from their intelligible existence. For they are one insofar as they are intelligible, but multiplied insofar as they are particular and in matter."

<sup>33</sup> Sensation of individuals of a species is required for knowledge of a species. *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 79.11-12; (1985), p. 115.8-9; (1987), p. 202: وأيضا فإن من لم يحس أشخاص نوع ما لم يكن عنده معقوله. Note that I follow (1950) لم يكن and not (1985) لم تكن.

"Also, if one does not have sensation of individuals of a certain species, one does not have the intelligible of it."

<sup>34</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 83.11-12; (1985), p. 120.13; (1987), p. 206: فليس لها هيولى إلا على جهة التشبيه والتجوز

"For it does not have matter except by analogy and metaphor."

made evident that [the intelligibles] exist only as dependent on [the forms of the imagination] and that [the intelligibles] exist with [the forms of the imagination] and perish with their perishing, then the disposition which is in the forms of the imagination for receiving the intelligibles is the first material intellect.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, since the disposition that is called material intellect and that exists in the forms of the imagination cannot be self-actuating and since the intelligibles in it are not images but intelligibles as universal, not particular, it remains that an Agent Intellect which is per se intellectual and intelligible in act must provide the intellectuality of abstraction or conception. "For the material intellect, insofar as it is material, needs necessarily for its existence that there be here an intellect existing eternally in act."<sup>36</sup> And when this actuality of the Agent Intellect<sup>37</sup> is present to or "in" a human being for abstraction as what

<sup>35</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 86.5-15; (1985), p. 124.1-10; (1987), p. 209:

إنه إذ قد تبين أن هذه المعقولات حادثة، فهناك ضرورة استعداد يتقدمها ولما كان الاستعداد مما لا يفارق، لزم أن يوجد في موضوع وليس يمكن أن يكون هذا الموضوع جسما، حسب ما تبين من أن هذه المعقولات ليست هيولانية، بالوجه الذي به الصور الجسمانية هيولانية ولا يمكن أيضا أن تكون عقلا، إذ كان ما هو بالقوة شيئا ما، فليس فيه شيء ما بالفعل مما هو قوى عليه وإذا كان ذلك كذلك، فالموضوع لهذا الاستعداد ضرورة (هو) نفس وليس يظهر هاهنا شيء أقرب إلى أن يكون الموضوع لهذه المعقولات من بين قوى النفس سوى الصور الخيالية إذ كان قد تبين أنها إنما توجد مرتبطة بها، وأنها توجد بوجودها، وتعدم بعدمها. فاذن الاستعداد الذي في الصور الخيالية لقبول المعقولات هو العقل الهيولاني الأول.

Regarding a correction to the printed text of *Short Commentary* (1950) here, see note 13 above.

<sup>36</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 88.14-16; (1985), pp. 126.17-127.1; (1987), p. 212: وذلك أن العقل الهيولاني، بما هو هيولاني، يحتاج ضرورة في وجوده إلى أن يكون هاهنا عقل موجود بالفعل دائما. In his *Short Commentary on the Parva Naturalia*, Averroes seems to set forth a similar doctrine. "If all the foregoing is ascertained, it cannot be denied that the separate intelligence endows the imaginative soul with the universal nature (*aṭ-ṭabī'ah al-kullīyah*) that the individual that comes into being possesses, that is to say, with a comprehension of its causes, and the imaginative soul will receive it as a particular (*juz'īyah*) by virtue of the fact that it is in matter. It may receive the individual (*shakhṣ*) of that which has been comprehended, in reality, or it may receive something similar to it. Just as the intelligence endows one with the universal perfections of the soul and matter receives them as particulars, so here too the intelligence endows the imaginative soul with the final perfection as a universal, and the soul receives it as a particular." *Averrois Cordubensis Compendia Librorum Aristotelis Qui Parva Naturalia Vocantur*, Shields, A.L., and Blumberg, H., eds., Cambridge, MA, 1949, p. 109-110; *Averroes. Epitome of Parva Naturalia. Translated from the Original Arabic and the Hebrew and Latin Versions*, Blumberg, H., tr., Cambridge, MA, 1961, p. 46; *Abū al-Walīd Ibn Rushd. Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Ḥiss wa-l-Maḥsūs*, Blumberg, H. ed., Cambridge, MA, 1972, p. 79.7-12.

<sup>37</sup> In the *Short Commentary* Averroes uses both العقل الفاعل or الفاعل and العقل الفاعل to denote the Agent or Active Intellect, as I indicated earlier. See *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 75.18 and p. 88.18; (1985) p. 123.13 and p. 127.4; (1987) p. 209 and p. 212.

Averroes characterizes as "form for us",<sup>38</sup> there takes place the elevation of intelligibles from particularity to universality. "This state is what is known as uniting and conjoining",<sup>39</sup> writes Averroes. The intelligibles garnered by the soul in this way must remain unmixed with the forms of the imagination as transcendent, and yet must also be linked, adjacent, and transcendent to their subject, the forms of the imagination,<sup>40</sup> since (as Aristotle says following Anaxagoras) intellect must remain unmixed in order to know.<sup>41</sup>

In the *Short Commentary* Averroes mentions Themistius eight times, matched among the post Aristotelian thinkers only by Alexander whom he also mentions eight times. The three passages of the chapter on the rational faculty are particularly relevant to the doctrine of intellect and intelligibles and brief consideration of each will prove valuable for comparison to his use of Themistius in other works.

The first mention of Themistius in the chapter on the rational faculty occurs in the context of a discussion of the nature of the existence of universals and their foundation in experience.<sup>42</sup> There Averroes is concerned

<sup>38</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 89.3-6; (1985), p. 127.7-10; (1987), p. 212:

ولذلك يظن أن عقله ممكن لنا بآخرة، أعني من حيث هو صورة لنا، ويكون قد حصل لنا ضرورة معقول أولي إذ كان في نفسه عقلا سواء عقلناه نحن أو لم نعقله، لا أن وجوده عقلا من فعلنا كالحال في المعقولات الهيولانية.

"For this reason it is clear that its intellect can belong to us ultimately. I mean insofar as it is form for us and it is such that it has generated for us as necessary an eternal intelligible. Since it is itself an intellect whether or not we have intellectual understanding of it, it is not the case that its existence as intellect is from our activity as is the case in regard to material intelligibles." Regarding this notion of the Agent Intellect as "form for us", see Geoffroy, M., "Averroès sur l'intellect comme cause agente et cause formelle et la question de la 'jonction'" in *Averroès et les averroïsmes juif et latin. Actes du colloque tenu à Paris, 16-18 juin 2005* (cited in note 15), pp. 77-110. Also see Taylor, R. C., "The Agent Intellect as 'form for us' and Averroes's critique of al-Fārābī" cited in note 6 and "Intelligibles in act in Averroes" cited in nt. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 89.6-7; (1985), p. 127.10-11; (1987), p. 213: وهذه الحال هي التي تعرف بالاتحاد والاتصال

<sup>40</sup> Geoffroy notes that cosmology provided Averroes with models to explain the relationship between corporeal powers such as imagination or cogitation and the immaterial power of intellect. See *Averroès. La Béatitude de l'âme. Éditions, traductions et études*, Geoffroy, G., and Steel, C., eds. and tr., Paris, 2001, pp. 71 ff. Geoffroy and Steel point out that Averroes seems to have in mind this cosmological model to explain the transcendence of the material intellect in his *Against the Avicennians on the First Cause* (1997) composed in the same period. See *Averroès. La Béatitude de l'âme* (2001), pp. 71-73. Averroes has also a cosmological model in mind in the *Short Commentary*. See (1985) section 124, p. 122, line 10.

<sup>41</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 87; (1985), p. 125; (1987), p. 210.

<sup>42</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 81; (1985), pp. 117-118; (1987), p. 204.

with the issue of the subject of intelligibles and asserts that on the account of Plato the universals do not have need of a subject if they exist in act external to the soul.<sup>43</sup> Averroes rejects this and holds instead that they do not exist outside the soul except insofar as they are in individuals of the world, mentioning Aristotle's account in the *Metaphysics*. Rather, the basis for the universals is found in the images of corresponding individuals (*khayālāt ashkhāṣi-hā*) so that the universals come to be multiplied with the multiplication of individuals, in such a way that the intelligible belonging to one person is not the same as the intelligible belonging to another. In this way, writes Averroes, the universals are based on the images belonging individually to each human being, such that the connection between the intelligibles and the forms of the imagination is essential to human understanding. To this extent, then, the apprehension of universals in the soul depends upon their subject, the forms in the imagination belonging to individuals. For this reason, Averroes rejects the confusion of Themistius and others who hold that the forms exist eternally in act external to the soul.

For this Platonic understanding of the doctrine of Themistius in the Arabic translation of the *Paraphrase of the De Anima*, Averroes appears to read Themistius to assert both that there is one transcendent Agent Intellect and that there is one set of transcendent forms in the Agent Intellect. These are clearly implied where Averroes reads the following in the Arabic version of Themistius.

There need be no wonder that we all are as a group composites of what is in potency and of what is in act. All of us whose existence is by virtue of this one are referred back to a one which is the Agent Intellect. For if not this, then whence is it that we possess known sciences in a shared way? And whence is it that the understanding of the primary definitions and primary propositions is alike [for us all] without learning? For it is right that, if we do not have one intellect in which we all share, then we also do not have understanding of one another.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 81.7; (1985), p. 117.12-13; (1987), p. 204: لو كانت موجودة بالفعل خارج النفس.

<sup>44</sup> Themistius, Arabic (1973), pp. 188.17-189.4: وليس ينبغي أن يعجب من أن نكون كلنا معشر المركبين من الذي بالقوة والذي بالفعل وكل واحد منا إنما وجوده من قبل ذلك الواحد نرجع إلى واحد هو العقل الفعال فإنه لولا ذلك من أين كانت تكون لنا العلوم المتعارفة مشتركة ومن أين كان يكون الفهم للحدود الأول وللقضايا الأول مماثلا بلا تعلم فإنه خالق أن يكون لو لم يكن لنا عقل واحد نشترك فيه كلنا لم نكن الأول. This corresponds to Themistius, Greek (1899), pp. 103.36-104.3: εἰ δὲ εἰς ἓνα ποιητικὸν νοῦν ἅπαντες ἀναγόμεθα οἱ συγκείμενοι ἐκ τοῦ δυνάμει καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ, καὶ ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν τὸ εἶναι παρὰ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἐκείνου ἐστίν, οὐ χρὴ θαυμάζειν. πόθεν γὰρ αἱ κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι; πόθεν δὲ ἡ ἀδίδακτος καὶ ὁμοία τῶν



Averroes was aided in forming this understanding of Themistius by remarks shortly prior to these in which he finds the following in the Arabic text: "So whence does the intellect which is in potency come to know all things if that which guides it to act is not first understanding all things?"<sup>45</sup>

At his second mention of Themistius in this section, Averroes also understands Themistius to hold that the receptive material intellect is a power which is eternal (*azalī*) in its essence even though the intelligibles existing in it are corruptible due to their connection with the forms of the imagination.<sup>46</sup> That is, Themistius holds that the receptive or potential intellect qua intellect must be entirely unaffected and separate as unmixed with the body so that it may be receptive of intelligibles. In the Arabic version, we find Themistius referring to this receptive intellect saying that, "the intellect does not use a bodily organ in its activity and is entirely unmixed with the body such that it is unaffected and separate"<sup>47</sup> and that as such it is imperishable.<sup>48</sup> Yet, while Averroes holds that the material intellect also must be unaffected and separate, his view is not the same as what he finds in Themistius. Averroes here reads Themistius as holding that human beings have individual material intellects which are receptive of intelligibles so as to be unmixed with and

πρώτων ὄρων σύνεσις καὶ τῶν πρώτων ἀξιωματῶν μήποτε γὰρ οὐδὲ τὸ σθινέναι ἀλλήλων ὑπῆρχεν ἂν, εἰ μή τις ἦν εἰς νοῦς, οὗ πάντες ἐκοινωνοῦμεν. Themistius, English (1996), p. 129: "There is no need to be puzzled if we who are combined from the potential and the actual [intellects] are referred back to one productive intellect, and that what it is to be each of us is derived from that single [intellect]. Where otherwise do the notions that are shared (*koinoi ennoiai*) come from? Where is the untaught and identical understanding of the primary definitions and primary axioms derived from? For we would not understand one another unless there were a single intellect that we all shared."

<sup>45</sup> Themistius, Arabic (1973), p. 188.12-13: *ومن أين يصير العقل الذي بالقوة يعقل الأشياء كلها إن لم يكن الذي يقوده إلى الفعل هو أولاً يعقل الأشياء كلها*. This corresponds to Themistius, Greek (1899) p. 103.30-32: *πόθεν δὲ καὶ ὁ δυνάμει νοῦς πάντα νοήσῃ, εἰ μὴ πρῶτος πάντα νοεῖ ὁ προάγων αὐτὸν εἰς ἐνέργειαν*; "From what source will the potential intellect also come to think all objects, if the intellect that advances it to activity does not think all objects prior to it?" Themistius, English (1996), p. 128.

<sup>46</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 83; (1985), p. 121; (1987) pp. 206-7.

<sup>47</sup> Themistius, Arabic (1973), p. 191.7-8: *فأما العقل فإنه ليس يستعمل آلة جسمانية في فعله ولا يخالط الجسم أصلاً فإنه غير منفعل ومفارق*. Themistius, Greek (1899) p. 105.10-12: *τὸν νοῦν δὲ ἅτε μὴ χρώμενον ὀργάνῳ σωματικῷ πρὸς τὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ ἄμικτον τῷ σώματι παντάπασιν καὶ ἀπαθῆ καὶ χωριστόν*. Themistius, English (1996) p. 130: "[T]he intellect, insofar as it does not use a bodily organ for its activity, is entirely unmixed with the body, is unaffected, and is separate."

<sup>48</sup> At Themistius, Greek (1899), p. 104, 23 ff., the issue is the imperishability of the potential intellect and the implied conclusion is for its imperishability. While part of the Arabic text is missing from the sole extant manuscript, the conclusion of this section is preserved. See nt. 47 for the texts.

separate from body and its affections and also to be imperishable as recipients of intelligibles.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, Averroes himself holds for the unmixed and separate nature of the power called material intellect but declines to hold for its imperishable and immortal nature, opting instead for a very different understanding of the material intellect as a disposition of the forms of the imagination in the soul and consequently as perishable with its subject, as discussed above.<sup>50</sup>

The third mention of Themistius in the chapter on the rational power in the *Short Commentary* concerns Averroes' simply marveling that Themistius can hold both (i) that the potential or material intellect does not have a properly "material affectivity" (*al-infī'āl al-hayūlānī*) and nevertheless has many of the characteristics of matter and (ii) that the intelligibles in it are eternal. As Averroes sees it in this work, Themistius is involving too many of the conditions of matter, in the true or literal sense of that term, in his understanding of the potential intellect, which properly should be understood as material only metaphorically.<sup>51</sup> Rather, as indicated earlier, Averroes holds that the potential or material intellect should not be understood as something existing imperishably separate and somehow containing eternal intelligibles, but rather as a disposition of the forms of the imagination.

Thus, in his *Short Commentary on the De Anima* of Aristotle, Averroes stresses the foundation of human knowledge in sense perception and the processing, refining, and elevating of intentions by the inner powers of the soul. In this the important role of spiritualizing belonged to the power of imagination which he identified as distinctive in human beings for serving the higher power of rationality. The nature of the intelligibles grasped in human knowing of universals required that there be both a receptive subject for immaterial intelligibles and also an active intellectual power to raise up to the level of intellect the potential intelligibles in the intentions apprehended by sensation and the soul's internal powers. That power was identified here with the Agent Intellect of *De Anima* 3.5, while the receptive subject or material intellect was identified as a disposition of the human imagination. As such, however, insofar as the human power of imagination is perishable, so too would be the human

<sup>49</sup> See *Long Commentary* (1953), p. 389; pp. 392 ff. for the same view.

<sup>50</sup> This view is close to that of Ibn Bājjah who held the material intellect to be "a form having as its matter the intermediate spiritual forms of the imagination." See nt. 13 for the Arabic text of Ibn Bājjah and references.

<sup>51</sup> *Short Commentary* (1950), p. 84; (1985), pp. 121-122; (1987), p. 207.

material intellect, though Averroes does not make explicit this obvious consequence. As for Themistius, his teachings are not taken over by Averroes but rather criticized as Platonic and rejected in view of the contradictory elements Averroes found in those teachings.

### 1.2. *The Middle Commentary on the De Anima*

As indicated earlier, in the *Middle Commentary on the De Anima* Averroes continues to hold for a plurality of individual human material intellects. As I have indicated elsewhere,<sup>52</sup> careful study of the paraphrasing *Middle Commentary* indicates a significant change of doctrine on the nature of the material intellect in the thought of Averroes. Here Averroes reacts against his own conception in the *Short Commentary* that the term material intellect denotes not an intellect as such but rather a disposition in the forms of the imagination having as subject the individual human soul. Instead, Averroes raises the issue of the material intellect as necessarily unmixed with the body or a power in the body even though Aristotle himself does not broach this subject in his corresponding text. After asserting that the material intellect must be altogether free of mixture with material forms and “cannot be mixed with the subject in which it is found” he goes on to explain that such a mixture would impede reception or change the received form such that “the forms of things would not exist in the intellect as they really are – that is, the forms existing in the intellect would be changed into forms different from the actual forms. If, therefore, the nature of the intellect is to receive the forms of things which have retained their natures, it is necessary that it be a faculty unmixed with any form whatsoever.”<sup>53</sup>

While he had earlier thought that the material intellect must be understood metaphorically since properly speaking it is neither matter in the primary sense nor intellect in the primary sense, here Averroes provides an account which appears to address the issue of whether the material intellect as receptive of intelligibles in act must not in fact have an existence wholly immaterial and separate from body and powers of body such as imagination – and not only metaphorically so.

<sup>52</sup> See the brief account in my article “Intelligibles in act in Averroes” cited in nt. 20. This is discussed at greater length in *Long Commentary* tr. (2009), introduction, pp. XXVIII–XLII.

<sup>53</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 109.

In his account of *De Anima* 3.5 in the *Middle Commentary*, Averroes rejects the extremes of the accounts of Alexander and Themistius. Alexander had conceived of the material intellect "as nothing other than disposition only" and not an intellect as such. Averroes writes regarding the view of Alexander, "Although this disposition is in a subject, since it is not mixed with the subject, the subject does not serve as an intellect in potentiality."<sup>54</sup> That is, while the name "material intellect" denotes a disposition which is "in" or possessed by a human being, the subject having the disposition is not itself the material intellect. Averroes rejects this approach because this notion of disposition is characteristic of matter and material things as receptive, while the subject for this disposition, the human knower, must meet the criterion that "that which is disposed to receive something intelligible must be an intellect."<sup>55</sup> In contrast to this denial of a substantial subject in which the material intellect exists, Themistius, here indicated by the words, "the other commentators," held that the material intellect should be a disposition in a subject as a separate substance since the material intellect must be unmixed.<sup>56</sup> Yet this position, says Averroes, requires the absurdity "that there should be a separate substance, the existence of which occurs in disposition and potentiality."<sup>57</sup> That is, it requires that what is separate intellect and as such immaterial and fully actual also have potentiality characteristic of material things. These were the considerations that compelled Averroes to adopt his own alternative view that rejects each of these approaches.

As Alfred Ivry points out in the introduction to his translation of the *Middle Commentary*,

The material intellect, consequently, stands in relation to the Agent Intellect as matter stands in relation to form: it supplies the basis upon which the Agent Intellect builds. For Averroes, though, the Agent Intellect does not emanate its forms directly upon the material intellect of an individual. Rather, like light upon an object, it "illuminates" or brings out the intelligible dimension of sensible forms, a dimension which is also latent or potential in the forms occurring in both the sensory and imaginative faculties. The Agent Intellect is said to actualize these potential intelligibles external to the intellect, as well as to actualize the material intellect itself – that is, to bring it from potential to actual intellection.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 110.

<sup>55</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 110.5-6:

وإن كان هذا الاستعداد هو في موضوع إلا أنه من قبل أنه ليس مخالطاً له لم يكن الموضوع له عقلاً بالقوة

<sup>56</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 110.12-16.

<sup>57</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 111.1-2: الاستعداد والقوة: أن يكون جوهر مفارق وجوده في الاستعداد والقوة

<sup>58</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), introduction, p. XVII.



The material intellect comes to actuality as intellect only thanks to its conjoining with the Agent Intellect which is intellect per se and able to raise this disposition in human beings to the level of receptive intellect. This avoids the absurdity noted above, that of positing an immaterial separate substance and intellect (which *qua* intellect is fully actual) as having disposition and potentiality. Yet it allows for the receptivity of disposition and potentiality characteristic of human understanding to be conjoined with what is intellect per se as required by the intellectual apprehension of intelligibles in act. Averroes describes this when he writes,

Both approaches to the material intellect have thus been explained to you – that of Alexander and that of the others – and it will have become clear to you that the truth, which is the approach of Aristotle, is a combination of both views, in the manner we have mentioned. For, by our position as stated, we are saved from positing something separate in its substance as a certain disposition, positing [instead] that the disposition found in it is not due to its [own] nature but due to its conjunction with a substance which has this disposition essentially – namely, man – while, in positing that something here is associated incidentally with this disposition, we are saved from [considering] the intellect in potentiality as a disposition only.<sup>59</sup>

The model used by Averroes here is that of the celestial bodies, souls and intellects, as noted by Marc Geoffroy.<sup>60</sup> For Averroes the celestial soul moves the associated celestial body and is equivocally “in” it without being composed with it after the manner of the substantial or accidental composition that takes place among hylomorphic entities. That is, just as the celestial soul is the mover “in” and belonging to the moving celestial body without being literally in it as composed with it, so too the human material intellect is “in” and belongs to the knowing human being without being composed in a hylomorphic way as with a material subject. In this way Averroes meets the need that the subject for intelligibles in act, the material intellect, must literally be immaterial and separate as an intellect – even if it is a disposition. Although this sort of separation from the body and the powers of soul existing in body assures a properly immaterial subject for intelligibles in act, Averroes does not

<sup>59</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 112.6-13. That is, this association with the transcendent Agent Intellect is incidental to the essence of the Agent Intellect but essential to the nature of human beings as rational animals able to have intellectual understanding of the intelligibles garnered from sense perception and the activities of the internal senses. Note that I change Ivry’s “substantively separate” for مفارقا في جوهره to “separate in its substance.”

<sup>60</sup> Averroès. *La Béatitude de l’âme* (2001), pp. 64-65, 71 ff.

separate intellect from soul and body wholly, since the material intellect continues to be "in" and to belong to the human being from whom it derives its individuation as the material intellect of this particular person.

What brings the human material intellect from potentiality to actuality is the activity of the Agent Intellect in its dual function as agent in the abstraction of intelligibles and as "form for us" insofar as it is present in us and acting in accord with our will in our efforts to abstract intelligibles from human experience of the world. Averroes writes,

It is clear that, in one respect, this intellect is an agent and, in another, it is a form for us (*ṣūrah la-nā*), since the generation of intelligibles is a product of our will. When we want to think something, we do so, our thinking it being nothing other than, first, bringing the intelligible forth and, second, receiving it. The individual intentions in the imaginative faculty are they that stand in relation to the intellect as potential colors do to light. That is, this intellect renders them actual intelligibles after their having been intelligible in potentiality. It is clear, from the nature of this intellect – which, in one respect, is a form for us (*ṣūrah la-nā*) and, in another, is the agent for the intelligibles – that it is separable and neither generable nor corruptible, for that which acts is always superior to that which is acted upon, and the principle is superior to the matter. The intelligent and intelligible aspects of this intellect are essentially the same thing, since it does not think anything external to its essence. There must be an Agent Intellect here, since that which actualizes the intellect has to be an intellect, the agent endowing only that which resembles what is in its substance.<sup>61</sup>

Earlier in his *Short Commentary* Averroes used the phraseology of "form for us" to describe the way the Agent Intellect generates intelligibles in the material intellect.<sup>62</sup> Here that notion is present as well as the consideration that these intelligibles come to exist by our willing. In its activity of bringing about intelligibles in act subsequent to our initiation of the effort to think by providing intentions in the imagination, the Agent Intellect is available to us a power for abstracting intelligibles which may be suitably denominated as "a product of our will." This development of the notion of the Agent Intellect as an agent power for abstraction at our disposal and available by our willing seems clearly to be derived from the account of Themistius in his *Paraphrase of the De Anima*. In the Arabic text of the account of Themistius we find him writing that

The relation of craft to matter is just as the relation of the actual intellect (*al-ʿaql al-fāʿil*) to the intellect in potency. In this manner the intellect

<sup>61</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 116. Translation slightly modified.

<sup>62</sup> See nt. 38.



Direct mention of Themistius occurs in the *Middle Commentary* only once, in the following passage:

You ought to know that Themistius and most commentators regard the intellect in us as composed of the intellect which is in potency and the intellect which is in act, that is, the Agent Intellect. In a certain way it is composite and does not think its essence but thinks what is here, when the imaginative intentions are joined to it. The intelligibles perish due to the passing away of these intentions, forgetting and error thus occurring to [our intellect]. They interpret Aristotle's statement in this manner, as explained in our commentary on his discourse.<sup>65</sup>

In sum, in both the *Short Commentary* and the *Middle Commentary* Averroes held the view that each human being has a personal material intellect through which intelligibles in act and intellectual understanding take place for individuals. In the *Short Commentary* the material intellect is taken as a name denoting the receptive power for retaining intelligibles as a disposition of the forms of the imagination in the human soul. In the *Middle Commentary*, Averroes understood the material intellect to be immaterial and separate from body, soul, and imagination so as to be a true intellectual and immaterial subject for intelligibles in act, though nevertheless retaining a certain presence "in" or a necessary association with the human being to whom it belongs and in virtue of whom the material intellect has its individuation. The human material intellect could only have its nature as intellect through a conjoining or uniting with the Agent Intellect since the material intellect in its own right could neither be solely disposition nor wholly intellect. In both works Averroes engages the work of Themistius. He criticizes Themistius in the *Short Commentary* for a seemingly incoherent teaching on intellect and intelligibles, a doctrine too literal in its understanding of the material intellect as intellect and as matter. In the *Middle Commentary* Averroes makes only a passing mention of the name of Themistius. However, Averroes does draw on the latter's notion of the Agent Intellect as available for human use when we wish to enhance his conception of the intrinsic presence of the Agent Intellect as being both form and agent for human understanding. As we shall see, however, reflections on teachings in the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by Themistius played a major role in the formation of the new doctrine of the single, eternal Material Intellect shared by all human beings set forth in full in the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*.

<sup>65</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 117.11-18.



## 2. Intellect in Averroes' *Long Commentary on De Anima of Aristotle*: One Transcendent Shared Agent Intellect and One Transcendent Shared Material Intellect

In all three of his *Commentaries on the De Anima* Averroes sided with the Greek and Arabic traditions in asserting the existence of a single transcendent and immaterial Agent Intellect shared by all human beings functioning, according to him, as an abstracting cause of the intelligibles understood in human knowing. Unique to Averroes is his famous late teaching in the *Long Commentary on De Anima* that there is a single Material Intellect receptive of intelligibles in act and shared by all human beings. This notion was first raised as a possibility by Averroes in a short treatise on human conjunction with separate intellect which has come to be labeled *Epistle 1 on Conjunction*. There Averroes raises the question of whether a receptive and immaterial disposition such as the material intellect might exist "as a substance one in number for all human beings in itself."<sup>66</sup> As was made clear in the *Middle Commentary*, in order to be intellect and to be a subject receptive of intelligibles, this *disposition* named material intellect must be separate from body and truly immaterial as intellect. In the *Middle Commentary* that separation met the necessary requirements by being only equivocally "in" the human soul following the model of the intellects, souls and bodies in the heavens. That is, the material intellect is not in the soul as composed with it but as associated with the individual human soul and as identified as belonging to and as being individuated by the individual who provides the imagined forms for abstraction. The proposal now under consideration in *Epistle 1 on Conjunction* and which became his mature view in the *Long Commentary*, the Material Intellect as receptive disposition existing as "a substance one in number for all human beings" was unequivocally rejected by Averroes in the *Middle Commentary* where he called absurd the notion "that there should be a separate substance, the existence of which occurs in disposition and potentiality. This [is absurd] because potentiality is one of the properties of material objects."<sup>67</sup>

The possibility of a single shared Material Intellect considered in *Epistle 1 on Conjunction* involves not just separation from the particular

<sup>66</sup> Averroès, *La Béatitude de l'âme* (2001), p. 210. Note that here Averroes considers the possibility that the material intellect be not just a disposition but a substance in its own right. He had explicitly rejected that view in the *Middle Commentary*. See *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 111.

<sup>67</sup> *Middle Commentary* (2002), p. 111.

body and soul for the sake of a particular human being's immaterial reception of intelligibles, but also a separation from individuation by a particular body and soul.<sup>68</sup> The model employed here is again a celestial one. Averroes raises the issue of whether there might not be another kind of separation which does not entail the individuation of what is separate by a body to which it is in some fashion related. Such is the case with the First Mover of *Physics* VIII,<sup>69</sup> which is essential to the existence of the motions of the heavens and all things on earth and yet is not dependent for its being and individuation on the plurality of things in which it causes motion. From the side of moved things of the universe, the First Mover, the Unmoved Mover, is an essential cause of the existence of movement. But from the side of the First Mover, none of the caused movements or moved things is essential and definitive of its being; rather, they are incidental to the being of the First Mover which is one in number *per se*, not *per aliud*. It is in this context that Averroes asks, "So what would be able to prevent one from thinking that some dispositions can exist in this way?"<sup>70</sup> Averroes does not explore the matter further in *Epistle 1 on Conjunction* but chooses to leave the question for another opportunity when it can be given profound study. Averroes found that opportunity in the course of his completion of his *Long Commentary on the De Anima*.

The preparation of the final version of the *Long Commentary* provided Averroes with a third opportunity to study in depth the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by Themistius along with the text of the *De Anima* itself in two translations.<sup>71</sup> In the course of his studies in preparation of what is generally regarded as the final version of the *Long Commentary* extant

<sup>68</sup> I discuss this issue at greater length in "Intelligibles in act in Averroes" cited in note 20.

<sup>69</sup> Averroès. *La Béatitude de l'âme* (2001), p. 210. Geoffroy identifies the reference as *Physics* VIII, 266a10-b6. On celestial movement and the relation of celestial bodies, souls and intellects, see Twetten, D., "Averroes' prime mover argument," in *Averroès et les averroïsmes juif et latin. Actes du colloque tenu à Paris, 16-18 juin 2005* (cited in note 15), pp. 9-75, and the literature cited there.

<sup>70</sup> Averroès. *La Béatitude de l'âme* (2001), p. 210.

<sup>71</sup> The main translation used and provided in full by Averroes is not extant in Arabic aside from some fragments and quotations in other thinkers. It is represented in the Latin text and also in Hebrew translation. For the Hebrew, see *Aristotle's 'De Anima'. Translated into Hebrew by Zerahyah Ben Isaac Ben Shealtiel Hen. A Critical Edition with an Introduction and Index*, Bos, G., ed., Leiden-New York-Köln, 1994. The alternate translation cited by Averroes in the *Long Commentary* is available in *Aristotelis De Anima (Aristūṭālīs fī an-Nafs)*, Badawi, 'A. ed. (Cairo: Imprimerie Misr S.A.E., 1954; Rpt. Beirut/Kuwait, 1980). For a discussion of the current state of scholarship on the Arabic translations of Aristotle's *De Anima*, see the appendix on this issue by Puig Montada, J., to

only in Latin, Averroes rediscovered in Themistius the principle key to his assertion of the unity of the Material Intellect. As we have seen, Themistius asserted the necessity of the unity of intelligibles for the sake of shared sciences and understanding: "For it is right that, if we do not have one intellect in which we all share, then we also do not have understanding of one another."<sup>72</sup> This is the first of the two principles found in Themistius which Averroes adopts in the *Long Commentary* arguing against the notion of a plurality of the very same intelligibles in act existing in distinct human intellects. That is, since a proper understanding of knowledge requires that there be only one intelligible in act, say of horse, for the sake of common human understanding and intersubjective discourse, that very same intelligible cannot be multiplied in distinct human minds. Rather, science requires that there be a single collection of intelligibles in act for the universality of knowledge.<sup>73</sup> This doctrine, surely

"Ibn Bājja" published in the *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. See nt. 8 for the complete reference.

<sup>72</sup> See nt. 44 for the text.

<sup>73</sup> "That way in which we posited the being of the material intellect solves all the questions resulting from our holding that the intellect is one and many. For, if the thing understood in me and in you were one in every way, it would happen that when I would know some intelligible you would also know it, and many other impossible things [would also follow]. If we assert it to be many, then it would happen that the thing understood in me and in you would be one in species and two in individual [number]. In this way the thing understood will have a thing understood and so it proceeds into infinity. Thus, it will be impossible for a student to learn from a teacher unless the knowledge which is in the teacher is a power generating and creating the knowledge which is in the student, in the way in which one fire generates another {412} fire similar to it in species, which is impossible. That what is known is the same in the teacher and the student in this way caused Plato to believe that learning is recollection. Since, then, we asserted that the intelligible thing which is in me and in you is many in subject insofar as it is true, namely, the forms of the imagination, and one in the subject in virtue of which it is an existing intellect (namely, the material [intellect]), those questions are completely resolved." *Long Commentary* (1953), pp. 411-412; tr. (2009), pp. 328-329. Averroes is here drawing on Themistius, Greek (1899), pp. 104 ff. Averroes is well aware that this in turn requires that the material intellect itself be immaterial and unique with an existence of its own as an entity distinct in being and species. "[T]he definition of the material intellect, therefore, is that which is in potency all the intentions of universal material forms and is not any of the beings in act before it understands any of them. Since that is the definition of the material intellect, it is evident that according to him it differs from prime matter in this respect: it is in potency all the intentions {388} of the universal material forms, while prime matter is in potency all those sensibles forms [and is] not something which knows or apprehends [things]. The reason why that nature is something which discerns and knows while prime matter neither knows nor discerns, is because prime matter receives diverse forms, namely, individual and particular forms, while this [nature] receives universal forms. From this it is apparent that this nature is not a determinate particular (*non est aliquid hoc*) nor a body nor a power in a body. For, if it were so, then it would receive forms inasmuch as they are diverse and particular; and if it were so, then the forms existing

derived from Themistius, allows Averroes to move beyond the teachings of the *Middle Commentary* and to assert just what was called for in *Epistle 1 on Conjunction*. What had prevented the assertion of the existence of the Material Intellect "as a substance one in number for all human beings in itself" was precisely the doctrine of the *Middle* and *Short Commentaries* that the material intellect is a disposition in or associated and individuated in being by the particular human soul to which it belongs. In those two earlier works Averroes did not raise the issue of the nature of the intelligibles in detail to characterize the ontological and epistemological concerns at stake. Here in the *Long Commentary* he takes that up in detail and crafts his doctrine on the basis of this conception of the nature of intelligibles in act and openly recognizes the very special character of the Material Intellect when he writes, "One should hold that it is a fourth kind of being."<sup>74</sup> The resultant doctrine is that of the twofold subject: the intelligibles are to be understood as many insofar as they are caused by and linked to particular human beings and their individual human imaginative powers which are responsible for their truth (the subject of truth) and are to be understood as one insofar as they have the unique Material Intellect as the immaterial subject into which the intelligibles in act are received (the subject of existence).<sup>75</sup>

The second key principle Averroes found in Themistius is that of the formal, intrinsic participation by all human knowers in a single transcendent entity, the Agent Intellect. This we have already seen expressed in the *Short Commentary* and in the *Middle Commentary* with the phraseology describing the Agent Intellect as "form for us." In the *Long Commentary* Averroes continues to stress this notion but intensifies its meaning by repeating that the Agent Intellect and the Material Intellect

in it would be intelligibles in potency; and thus it would not discern the nature of the forms inasmuch as they are forms, as is the disposition in the case of individual forms, be they spiritual or corporeal. For this reason, if that nature which is called intellect receives forms, it must receive forms by a mode of reception other than that by which those matters receive the forms whose contraction by matter is the determination of prime matter in them. For this reason it is not necessary that it be of the genus of those matters in which the form is included, nor that it be prime matter itself. Since, if this were so, then the reception in these would be of the same genus; for the diversity of the received nature causes the diversity of the nature of the recipient. This, therefore, moved Aristotle to set forth this nature which is other than the nature of matter, other than the nature of form, and other than the nature of the composite." *Long Commentary* (1953), pp. 387-388; tr. (2009), pp. 304-305. Note the attribution to Aristotle.

<sup>74</sup> *Long Commentary* (1953), p. 409; tr. (2009), p. 326.

<sup>75</sup> See the first text in nt. 73.



are "in the soul."<sup>76</sup> Here, of course, Averroes is following Aristotle who, at *De Anima* 3.5, 430a13-14, indicates that potential and actualizing powers of mind must be in the soul (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ), as also Alexander and Themistius state.<sup>77</sup> Now, however, Averroes intensifies the notion of the Agent Intellect being a form which acts in us and by our volition by stressing that it is "form for us" as intrinsic and essential to human nature while also having an existence of its own external to the human soul. He writes,

For because that in virtue of which something carries out its proper activity is the form, while we carry out {500} our proper activity in virtue of the agent intellect, it is necessary that the agent intellect be *form in us*... [I]t is necessary that a human being understand all the intelligibles through the intellect proper to him and that he carry out the activity proper to him in regard to all beings, just as he understands by his proper intellection all the beings through the intellect in a positive disposition (*intellectus in habitu*), when it has been conjoined with forms of the imagination.<sup>78</sup>

That is, accepting that the Agent Intellect is a separately existing entity outside the human soul, that its power is required for intellectual abstraction and that abstractive thinking is in our will, Averroes embraces the

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, *Long Commentary* (1953), pp. 390; 406; 437; and 438; tr. (2009), pp. 307; 322; 349 et 350.

<sup>77</sup> Averroes understood another alternative to be the view of al-Fārābī that the Agent Intellect is only a cause acting on the human soul, not as "form for us." Regarding al-Fārābī, see the literature cited in note 6.

<sup>78</sup> *Quoniam, quia illud per quod agit aliquid suam propriam actionem est forma, nos autem agimus per intellectum {500} agentem nostram actionem propriam, necesse est ut intellectus agens sit forma in nobis.*

*Et nullus modus est secundum quem generetur forma in nobis nisi iste. Quoniam, cum intellecta speculativa copulantur nobiscum per formas ymaginabiles, et intellectus agens copulatur cum intellectis speculativis (illud enim quod comprehendit ea est idem, scilicet intellectus materialis), necesse est ut intellectus agens copuletur nobiscum per continuationem intellectorum speculativorum.*

*Et manifestum est quod, cum omnia intellecta speculativa fuerint existentia in nobis in potentia, quod ipse erit copulatus nobiscum in potentia. Et cum omnia intellecta speculativa fuerint existentia in nobis in actu, erit ipse tunc copulatus nobis in actu. Et cum quedam fuerint potentia et quedam actu, tunc erit ipse copulatus secundum partem et secundum partem non; et tunc dicimur moveri ad continuationem.*

*Et manifestum est quod, cum iste motus complebitur, quod statim iste intellectus copulabitur nobiscum omnibus modis. Et tunc manifestum est quod proportio eius ad nos in illa dispositione est sicut proportio intellectus qui est in habitu ad nos. Et cum ita sit, necesse est ut homo intelligat per intellectum sibi proprium omnia entia, et ut agat actionem sibi propriam in omnibus entibus, sicut intelligit per intellectum qui est in habitu, quando fuerit continuatus cum formis ymaginabilibus, omnia entia intellectione propria.*

*Long Commentary* (1953), pp. 499-500 (emphasis added); tr. (2009), p. 399.

notion that the Agent Intellect must also be our intrinsic formal cause insofar as we are knowers. That is, the soul's abstractive nature, the Agent Intellect, must be included in the very definition of the nature of human beings as rational animals.<sup>79</sup> Only by this intrinsic sharing or participation of the Agent Intellect are human beings able to carry out the operations and activities in virtue of which humans are called rational. Such a view, all the same, is hardly an obvious interpretation of the words of Aristotle in *De Anima* 3.5. In the *Long Commentary* Averroes criticized al-Fārābī for holding that the Agent Intellect is only an extrinsic agent cause and not "form for us."<sup>80</sup> However, the view that Averroes expounds in the *Long Commentary* can be found in the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by Themistius.

Working through the complex issues and requirements of the Aristotelian account of intellect in *De Anima* 3.4-5, Themistius asserted the existence of four sorts of intellects: the potential intellect, the actual intellect, the Productive Intellect (Agent Intellect in the Arabic available to Averroes), and the passible intellect. The last of these four may be dismissed for present purposes since it is identified with the imagination and is characterized as perishable. On the account of Themistius, the potential intellect garners images from the imagination and comes to be

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Aquinas repeatedly uses the very same principle to the very different end of establishing that the agent intellect must be a power intrinsic to each human soul and cannot exist as a transcendent substance outside the soul. For example, he writes in his *De spiritualibus creaturis*, *Omne autem agens quaecumque actionem, habet formaliter in seipso virtutem quae est talis actionis principium. Unde sicut necessarium est quod intellectus possibilis sit aliquid formaliter inhaerens homini, ut prius ostendimus; ita necessarium est quod intellectus agens sit aliquid formaliter inhaerens homini. De spiritualibus creaturis*, Cos, J., ed., Rome and Paris, 2000, [S. Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia Iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita Cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum, Tomus XXIV, 2], a. 2 resp., p. 24.170-183. "Every thing performing some action has formally in itself the power which is the principle of such an action. Hence, just as it is necessary that the possible intellect be something formally inhering in a human being, as we showed earlier, so too it is necessary that the agent intellect be something formally inhering in a human being." Aquinas also invokes what I call the *Principle of Intrinsic Formal Cause* in this work at a. 2, resp, p. 25.227-230, and at a. 10 resp., p. 106.268-274. For a detailed discussion of this, see Taylor, R. C., "Intellect as Intrinsic Formal Cause in the Soul according to Aquinas and Averroes" in *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections on Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions*, Dillon, J., and El-Kaisy Friemuth, M., eds. Leiden, 2009, pp.187-220.

<sup>80</sup> On this see the articles mentioned in nt. 6. This view of al-Fārābī, while accurate insofar as the Agent Intellect is not held to be an intrinsic "form for us" according to al-Fārābī, does not convey the nuanced view of al-Fārābī in a clear way. Al-Fārābī seems to hold that abstraction is in some sense done by the individual human being thanks to the activity of the Agent Intellect or thanks to a power bestowed on the individual by the Agent Intellect.

taken over and penetrated to its depths by the Productive Intellect, which functions as an indispensable aid to the actual intellect responsible for the abstraction of intelligibles. Themistius says regarding the Productive Intellect, "[W]hen the productive intellect encounters [the potential intellect] and takes over this 'matter' of thoughts, the potential intellect becomes one with it, and becomes able to make transitions, and to combine and divide thoughts, and to observe thoughts from [the perspective of] one another."<sup>81</sup> He then writes that "... the productive intellect settles into the whole of the potential intellect, as though the carpenter and the smith did not control their wood and bronze externally but were able to pervade it totally. For this is how the actual intellect too is added to the potential intellect and becomes one with it."<sup>82</sup> Thus, human intellectual understanding comes about only when the transcendent and separately existing Productive Intellect penetrates and pervades the potential intellect thereby providing to and in the individual human being the intellectual power for abstraction called actual intellect. Without the intrinsic presence of the Productive Intellect which is the primary source of abstractive illumination in and employed by the individual human being's actual intellect, intellectual understanding would not take place.<sup>83</sup> Further, for Themistius the Productive Intellect is declared to be the real self of a human being insofar it provides the power of intellectual actuality which is responsible for human nature to exist as rational and intellectual in act. He writes, "What it is to be me therefore comes

<sup>81</sup> Themistius, Greek (1899), p. 99.8-10; English (1996), p. 123; Arabic (1973), p. 179.14-17.

<sup>82</sup> Themistius, Greek (1899), p. 99.15-18; English (1996), p. 123; Arabic (1973), p. 179.14-17.

<sup>83</sup> "[T]he intellect that illuminates (*ellampôn*) in a primary sense is one, while those that are illuminated (*ellamponenoi*) and that illuminate (*ellampones*) are, just like light, more than one." Themistius, Greek (1899), p. 103.30-33; English (1996), pp. 128-129; Arabic (1973), p. 188.12-14. He earlier writes, "Therefore 'it is necessary that these differences exist in the soul too' (430a13-14) and while one intellect must be potential, the other must be actual, i.e. perfect and not at all potential, or due to natural adaptation, but an intellect that is actual, which, by being combined with the potential intellect and advancing it to actuality, brings to completion the intellect as *hexis*, in which the universal objects of thought and bodies of knowledge exist." Themistius, Greek (1899), p. 98.19-24, English (1996), p. 122, Arabic (1973), pp. 172-174. Also see Greek (1899), p. 99.6-10, English (1996), p. 123, Arabic (1973), p. 179.6-9. In the account in the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* the Productive Intellect, while, not the First Cause, is said to think only separate forms "continuously and perpetually" and is characterized as a "divine intellect, which is separate and exists in actuality, thinks none of the enmattered forms." Themistius, Greek (1899), pp. 114.34-115.9; English (1996), p. 141; Arabic (1973), pp. 209.16-210.10.

from the productive intellect alone, since this alone is form in a precise sense." He then asserts that "we are the Productive Intellect."<sup>84</sup> Thus, intellectual understanding is to be accounted for by a participation of the transcendent Productive Intellect by the human knower, a participation that involves the immediate and necessary formal presence of the Productive Intellect in very activity of human intellectual understanding.

While Averroes does not follow Themistius in holding for an individual abstracting actual intellect to exist in each human soul, he did read in the Arabic version of Themistius that "the existence belonging to me [as rational animal] is from the Agent Intellect" and "we are the Agent Intellect"<sup>85</sup> as well as the other passages cited in the previous paragraph. Further, just as in Themistius, there is in Averroes the argument that the transcendent Productive or Agent Intellect must necessarily not stand off at a distance and act only as an agent cause in the abstraction of forms from the images in memory but rather it must penetrate and become wholly present as intrinsic formal cause such that it is a power under the willing control of the human being to which it belongs. In light of these considerations, it seems reasonable to conclude that Averroes' third reading of the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by Themistius in conjunction with a comprehensive study of the *De Anima* in the *Long Commentary* is likely responsible for the intensification of the doctrine of the Agent Intellect as "form for us" into the teaching that transcendent Agent Intellect must be shared and formally present in the human soul.

### 3. Conclusion: Participation in Themistius and Averroes

I have argued here that two principles central to the mature noetics of Averroes set forth in the final *Long Commentary on the De Anima* reflect the influence of his study of the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by Themistius. The first, that there must be a single set of intelligibles shared by all human beings for science and human intersubjective discourse to be possible, was set out by Themistius in a way that indicates that these are to be located in the Productive / Agent Intellect. For Themistius these intelligibles are not emanated to human knowers but rather remain in the

<sup>84</sup> Themistius, Greek (1899), pp. 100.20-101.1; English (1996), p. 125; Arabic (1973), pp. 182.13-183.5. My capitalization of "Productive Intellect" here and elsewhere.

<sup>85</sup> Themistius, Arabic (1983), p. 182.16-17: فالوجود لي إذا إنما يكون من العقل الفعال and p. 183.5: فنحن إذا العقل الفعال.



Productive Intellect which is asserted to contain all the forms. The content of human knowledge for Themistius, rather, comes from abstraction from the images garnered by human beings through perception, imagination and memory. Averroes agreed with Themistius in this, holding that human knowledge has its content from intentions first gathered in sense perception, then passed on and made more spiritual and less material in the common sense, then placed in imagination, then processed by cogitation, and finally placed in memory as the content on which the abstractive power of the Agent Intellect is brought to bear. He disagreed, however, in the notion that the forms of things are in any way precontained in the Agent Intellect.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Averroes' adoption from Themistius of the notion that knowledge necessarily requires a single set of common referents or intelligibles in act played a crucial role in the formation of his mature doctrine of the Material Intellect.

For each of these thinkers the notion of a common human sharing or participating in a single set of intelligibles in act was a necessary part of their theories of human intellectual understanding, be it done directly as in the case of Averroes' conception of the shared Material Intellect or perhaps indirectly in Themistius' assertion that the forms must be precontained in the Agent Intellect which guides and aids the human soul in intellectual abstraction.<sup>87</sup> Does this, then, provide grounds for finding a certain Platonism at work in the thought of Averroes? In this case the answer appears to be, no. In contrast to a Platonism which finds the essences or intelligible realities of things in the world to have primary existence in separate forms, Averroes holds that all the content of intellectual understanding is derived from sensory experience of things of the world. For him the forms of things exist either in the things of the world or in the soul. If in the soul, then there they exist as intelligibles in accord with the ontological requirements of intelligibles in act. That is, they must be immaterial realities as intelligibles and can only be present in a unique subject which is an immaterial intellect and yet receptive of abstracted intelligibles in act, the Material Intellect. This notion of the intelligibles being in the soul, then, is fully in accord with Averroes'

<sup>86</sup> *Long Commentary* (1953), p. 441: "For the agent intelligence understands nothing of the things which are here. It was necessary that the agent intelligence be separate, unmixed and impassible, insofar as it is what makes all forms intelligible."

<sup>87</sup> For Themistius this may have functioned as assuring that only true or proper intelligibles are abstracted by human actual intellects and received in human potential intellects, though he does not give a detailed account of why intelligibles must be in the Productive Intellect.

assertion that the Material Intellect must be, like the Agent Intellect, in the soul. Further, as we have seen, they must constitute a single shared set of intelligibles for the sake of the very meaning of knowledge as a shared, common human intellectual understanding evident in discourse. Yet, this seems rather to be in accord with the nature of human science as conceived by Aristotle, even if Aristotle himself never asserted the existence of a separate receptive Material Intellect in his sorely under-determined thinking on the nature of human intellectual understanding. Perhaps, then, it would be best to call this an Aristotelian participation.

The same term, Aristotelian participation, seems to apply suitably to the second principle so important to the noetics of Averroes and Themistius, the notion of the Agent / Productive Intellect as operating intrinsically in the human soul to the extent that it must be considered as intrinsic formal cause for its role in the activity of intellectual abstraction at the heart of human intellectual understanding. A Platonic participation in this case would instead involve a sharing of the actuality and power of the transcendent Agent / Productive Intellect in a diminished way in a lower level participant. But for each of these thinkers it is the very Agent / Productive Intellect itself, not an image or a diminished participant, which is at work in the human soul to make abstraction and understanding a very real part of the nature of human beings as rational and intellectual.

Averroes struggled with the doctrine of the intellect through all three of his commentaries on the *De Anima* of Aristotle working to meet the complex requirements of the Greek and Arabic traditions. In all three commentaries his chief interlocutors from the Greek tradition were Themistius and Alexander of Aphrodisias. He seems to have come to grips with the teaching of Alexander by the time of the *Middle Commentary* but the value and importance of the *Paraphrase on the De Anima* by Themistius clearly grew through the years as he worked through that text and its challenges repeatedly. This is not to say that Averroes was merely a follower of Themistius, something that clearly was not the case. However, his encounters and engagements with the arguments and accounts of Themistius played a significant role in his formulation of issues and answers concerning the doctrine of intellect in Aristotle, a doctrine that continues to challenge and stimulate philosophers today.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> My thanks to Alfred Ivry, Carlos Bazán, Peter Adamson, Owen Goldin, Carlos Fraenkel, David Twetten, Myrna Gabbe and Nathan Blackerby for valuable challenges, comments and suggestions regarding issues discussed here. This article is a product of the Aquinas and the 'Arabs' Project. For information see [www.AquinasAndTheArabs.org](http://www.AquinasAndTheArabs.org).

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