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AVERROES' PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTION OF SEPARATE INTELLECT AND GOD¹

Richard C. TAYLOR

The goal of this article is to make a modest contribution to our understanding of the thought of Averroes on the natures of God and separate intellects to the extent that the methodologies of the philosophical sciences were considered by him to be able to contribute to the human enterprise of grasping the Divine. Now, insofar as Averroes, like Aristotle before him, held that God is immaterial intellect and complete actuality, it will be necessary to explore the nature of intellect and how it is that Averroes, unlike Aristotle before him, held that God, the first of all intellects, is much more than just the first in a hierarchy of similar metaphysical actualities called intellects or intelligences. For Averroes God is no *primum inter pares* as one might argue is the position of Aristotle who asserts there to be a plurality of deities or separate intellects². Rather, for Averroes, God transcends all other entities which themselves possess an otherness³ that enables Averroes to call God the unique First Agent, the First Form, the First Principle, indeed, the First Cause, One not like other entities. To express this otherness found in the immaterial separate intellects below God, Averroes claimed something never found in Aristotle, namely that separate immaterial intellects other than God contain an aspect of potency even while they are in their own natures completely actual intellects. This notion, as will be recounted below, allowed Averroes a way to distinguish all other intellects from God, but only at the cost of the introduction of metaphysical and epistemological principles not found in Aristotle. What is the source and foundation for his assertion of this new metaphysical doctrine that some sort of potency in fact exists in what is wholly immaterial and wholly actual? The

¹ I am grateful to the Rev. Thaddeus Burch, Dean of the Graduate School and Chair of the Committee on Research, and also to the Department of Philosophy of Marquette University for funding assistance which made my participation in this conference possible. I am also grateful to David Twetten, Josep Puig Montada, Michael Marmura and Deborah Black for reading this paper and sharing with me their suggestions for its ameliorization.

² See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.7, 1073 b 2-1074 a 17.

³ To phrase this in another more familiar way, other things of the world are really related to God but God bears no real relation to them.

answer to this question is to be found in his psychology from which he draws this central metaphysical conception.

There are two parts to my account of the thought of Averroes following the outline of ideas just presented. First, I will explain the foundations of this doctrine of potency in separate, immaterial intellects and its arguments found in the Long Commentary on the *De anima*. Secondly, I will explain the role played in the metaphysics of separate substances by this doctrine of potency in separate intellects and God. In this second section, I will also consider the philosophical consequences of these doctrines with respect to Averroes' philosophical understanding of the nature of God.

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE METAPHYSICS OF INTELLECT⁴

In a number of philosophical works Averroes states clearly and directly that essential principles of Metaphysics are established in Psychology, that is, the Science of the Soul.

(i) In his early Epitome of the *Metaphysics*, Averroes sets forth the understanding that the method which establishes the nature of the existence of the separate, immaterial intellectual principles – the separate intellects – affecting the movement of the heavens is determined in the Science of the Soul. There he goes on to say that most of the principles employed in the Science of Metaphysics are taken from the Science of the Soul and that the knowledge garnered in the Science of the Soul is essential for there to be any knowledge of the sort of existence which the separate intellects have⁵;

(ii) In his Long Commentary on the *De caelo*, he writes that demonstrations concerning the celestial bodies and their movers in the Science of the Heavens or Cosmology are based on principles taken from Natural Science and Metaphysics. Natural Science, he says, shows that the movers of the celestial bodies do not exist in matter, while the Science of the Soul provides an understanding of both intellect and desire. For intelligible forms do not cause motion in human beings without desire which arises as a consequence of intellectual understanding. Hence, just as human beings are moved to action only insofar as imagination presents the intelligible as an object of imagination and thereby as an object of desire, analogously the eternally moving celestial bodies must possess desire and they must then also

⁴ This topic is explored in detail in R.C. Taylor, "Averroes on psychology and the principles of metaphysics", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36.4 (1998): 19-35.

⁵ Averroes, *Talkhīṣ Mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a*, ed. 'U. Amīn, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1958), pp. 135-6. German translation by S. van den Bergh, *Die Epitome der Metaphysik des Averroes* (Leiden, 1924), p. 117. See Appendix, item (i).

somehow possess soul⁶; (iii) In his late Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics* Averroes again states this view. For him it can be shown that celestial bodies are living entities which manifest only intellect and desire from among the powers of the soul and that the ultimate cause of their motion in place is intellect. The basis for this claim, he writes, is the establishment in *Physics* 8 that the cause of motion in celestial bodies is not something existing in matter but rather a separate form⁷. And that separate forms are intellects is something established in the Science of the Soul. Hence, he concludes, the separate movers of the heavens are intellects and move as agents and ends of motion⁸; (iv) And in the initial pages of his Long

⁶ *Aristotelis De caelo cum Averrois Cordubensis commentariis*, in *In Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentariis* (Venice, 1562), vol. V, II c.61, fol. 140 B-D. Reprinted in *Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentariis, Venetiis apud Junctas 1562-1574* (Frankfurt am Main, 1962). I am grateful to my colleague, David Twetten, for calling my attention to these passages from the Epitome of the *Metaphysics* and the Long Commentary on the *De caelo* which were not cited in my article on this topic. See note 4 above. On Averroes' doctrine in his commentaries on the *De Caelo*, see G. Endress, "Averroes' *De caelo*, Ibn Rushd's cosmology in his commentaries on Aristotle's *On the Heavens*", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 5 (1995): 9-49.

⁷ For detailed discussion of this issue, see D.B. Twetten, "Averroes on the prime mover proved in the *Physics*", *Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 26 (1995): 107-34.

⁸ "From this it is fully clear that these celestial bodies are alive and that among the powers of soul they have only intellect and the power of desire, *i.e.* [intellect] which causes motion in place. This is perhaps evident from what I say, for it has been explained in the eighth book of the *Physics* that what causes motion belonging to the celestial bodies is not in matter and is a separate form. And it was explained in the *De anima* that the separate forms are intellect. So, consequently, this mover is an intellect and is a mover insofar as it is an agent of motion and insofar as it is the end of motion" (*Averroès, Tafsîr Mâ ba'd at-tabî'at*, ed. M. Bouyges, S.J., 2nd ed., vol. II [Beirut, 1967], Book Lām c.36, pp. 1593-4). See Appendix, item (iii). My translation. Cf. Latin, *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis et epitome*, in *In Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentariis* (Venice, 1574), vol. VIII, XII c.36, fol. 318rv F-G. Cf. *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics. A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Book Lām (Leiden, 1984) by Ch. Genequand, p. 149: "From that, it appears in all clarity that celestial bodies have souls and that of the powers of the soul, they have only the intellect and the faculty of desire, I mean (the faculty) that imparts to them local motion. This appears from what I say: it has been explained in the eighth book of the *Physics* that the mover of these celestial bodies is without matter and a separate form, and in the *de Anima* that the separate forms are intellect. It follows that this mover is an intellect and that it is a mover insofar as it is the agent of motion and the end of motion". My understanding of the argument in this passage differs from that of Charles Genequand. See p. 36 of his introduction to his translation for discussion of this. The logic of the

Commentary on the *De anima*, Averroes explains Aristotle's remarks about the importance of the Science of the Soul saying,

Because we hold that knowledge concerns things which are honorable and desirable and that such things surpass one another on account of the confirmation associated with demonstration, on account of the nobility of the subject, or on account of both, as we find in the science of the soul, because in these two respects it surpasses [all] other sciences, except for divine science⁹, we must hold that the science of the soul comes before the other sciences; and for this reason we placed it in a position of priority among all subjects of inquiry¹⁰.

He then goes on to explain that the Science of the Soul provides important assistance to the other sciences (a) by providing knowledge about what is noblest among all the objects of Natural Science, namely soul in living things; (b) by supplying principles such as the nature of human beings and their end for moral science and such as the knowledge "that separate forms are intelligences, and also many other things concerning the knowledge of states consequent upon intelligence considered as intelligence and intellect"; and (c) by confirming propositions about first principles with knowledge about the causes of those propositions, since knowledge through the cause conveys more certainty than only knowledge of the fact¹¹.

position of Averroes in this passage plays a key role in the argument of Taylor, "Averroes on psychology and the principles of metaphysics".

⁹ That is, metaphysics. The full text of the Long Commentary on the *De anima* exists only in Latin. See *Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, ed. F.S. Crawford (Cambridge, 1953). Hereafter cited as *LCDA* (*Long Commentary on the De anima of Aristotle*). The Arabic original exists only in fragments. See A. Ben Chahida in "Iktishāf al-naṣṣ al-'arabi li-ahamm ajzā' al-sharḥ al-kabir li-Kitāb al-Nafs ta'lif Abi al-Walid ibn Rushd", *al-Hayāt al-thaqāfiyya* 35 (1985): 14-48. There are extant Arabic fragments corresponding to I 1.32-33. See Ben Chahida, p. 29.

¹⁰ "Et quasi dicit: et quia nos opinamur quod cognitio est de rebus honorabilibus et delectabilibus, et quod superant se adinvicem aut propter confirmationem demonstrationis aut propter nobilitatem subiecti aut propter utrunque, sicut invenimus in scientia de anima, scilicet quia superat in his duobus alias scientias, preter scientiam Divinam, necessarium est opinari quod scientia anime antecedit alias scientias; et ideo posuimus eam inter omnia quesita positione precedenti" (*LCDA*, I c.2, p. 4).

¹¹ "Et debes scire quod iuvamentum scientie anime ad alias scientias invenitur tribus modis. Quorum unus est secundum quod est pars illius scientie, immo nobilissima partium eius, sicut habet dispositionem cum scientia Naturali. Animalia enim sunt nobilissima corporum generabilium et corruptibilium; anima autem est nobilior omnibus que sunt in animalibus. Secundum est quia dat pluribus scientiis plura principia, ut scientie Morali, scilicet regendi civitates, et Divine. Moralis enim suscipit ab hac scientia ultimum finem hominis in eo quod est homo, et scientiam sue substantie que sit. Divinus

What the Science of Soul most importantly establishes for Averroes is that it is not impossible for a wholly immaterial intellect nevertheless to have a certain potency within it. He comes to this view by way of his famous doctrine of the separate Material Intellect in which all human knowers share. On his account of human knowing, it is necessary that the actuality of knowledge come to exist in a separate, immaterial Intellect as a consequence of contributions from the sensory and cogitative powers of individual human beings. The process is one which begins in sense perception, employs the activities of the powers of imagination and cogitation, involves the presentation of denuded images of particular forms before the abstractive power of the Agent Intellect, and concludes with the realization of immaterial non-particular intentions in the separate Material Intellect. This is the activity of conceptualization by intellect, *taṣawwur bi-al-'aql*, *imaginatio* or *formatio per intellectum*¹². While the explication of Averroes' doctrine of the Material Intellect is not the chief focus of this presentation, it is worth pointing out that his teachings on this topic result from his careful study of the Greek tradition of Aristotelian commentary and in particular from his critical reflections on the work of Themistius. Those critical reflections can be distilled into two propositions to which his reflections concluded. From these propositions, the doctrine of the Material Intellect arises. First, intellectual understanding, that is, knowledge of what we call universals, requires that it be received into something which is not a "this", a particular, since reception into a particular would render knowledge particular, not universal. Second, the unity of science requires that there be a common referent for the universals of scientific discourse, something which precludes there exist-

autem suscipit ab ea substantiam sui subiecti. Hic enim declarabitur quoniam forme abstracte sunt intelligentie, et alia multa de cognitione dispositionum consequentium intelligentiam in eo quod est intelligentia et intellectus. Tertium vero est commune iuvamentum, et est facere acquirere confirmationem in primis principiis; quoniam ex ea acquiritur cognitio causarum primarum propositionum, et cognitio alicuius per suam causam est magis firma quam sui esse tantum" (*LCDA*, I c.2, pp. 4-5).

¹² The sole occurrence of *ymaginatio per intellectum* in the *LCDA* occurs at I c.3, p. 6. The Arabic *taṣawwur bi-al-'aql*, "conceptualization by intellect", is found in the corresponding passage of the *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's de Anima*, ed. A.L. Ivry (Cairo, 1994), p. 2.5. The phrase, *ymaginatio per intellectum*, is used frequently to render the Arabic *taṣawwur bi-al-'aql* in the Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Book Lām. See, for example, Averroès, *Tafsīr Mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at*, Book Lām, pp. 1599-1600; *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII*, XII, c.37, 319H; Genequand tr., p. 151. Later in Book III of the *LCDA* the phrase *formare per intellectum*, "to conceptualize by intellect", is used to convey this notion. See *LCDA*, 270.82, 384, 391, 400, 408.9, 434 and 446.

ting a plurality of different material intellects, since in that case each intellect would have its own intelligibles in act¹³.

From this Averroes concludes that all human beings share in a single, separate Material Intellect. He further concludes that the unique Material Intellect in fact must contain some potency, insofar as it is receptive of intelligibles in act thanks to the cogitative powers of human beings and thanks to the abstractive powers of the separate Agent Intellect. That potency on the part of the Material Intellect is a directed passive potency for the reception of intelligibles in act. By its reception the Material Intellect becomes further actualized as intellect and it is this in which individual human beings share. Note that what the Material Intellect receives is an immaterial, intelligible intention, an intelligible in act, and that it receives the intelligible not as a particular, a "this", but insofar as it is the sole Material Intellect in which all humans share. This sort of reception is required by the very nature of intellectual understanding and by the approach Averroes has elected to follow in his account of intellect.

For the purposes of this article, two consequences need to be noted. First, by this account on the part of Averroes the Science of the Soul has been shown to require that the concept of immaterial intellect as a fully actual being can also allow for the inclusion of the notion of a certain potentiality in the genus of knowing. The Material Intellect is intellect and yet must include a note of passive potency with respect to its knowing. This separately existing substance, the Material Intellect, is unique in its special nature as knower and is so intimately involved with human beings that it is in a significant sense even included in the definition of human beings insofar as human beings are rational animals¹⁴. This is made all the more clear when Averroes describes the Material Intellect as in potency all the forms of the world: "[T]he Material Intellect is what is in potency all the intentions of universal material forms [...]"¹⁵. To this extent the Material Intellect, lowest in the hierarchy of separate intellects for Averroes, is unique as being the sole intellect which has a nature which bears an essential relationship to

¹³ This is discussed in greater detail in Taylor, "Averroes on psychology and the principles of metaphysics", pp. 23-5.

¹⁴ "The purpose of man, inasmuch as he is a natural being, is that he ascend to" the level of "the intelligibles of the theoretical sciences [...]" "[F]or the theoretical sciences [...] are of all things the strongest, the most free of matter, to the point that they are thought to be in a manner everlasting. [...] But this kind of perfection – *i.e.*, the moral, is laid down [in relation to] theoretical perfection as a preparatory rank, without which the attainment of the end is impossible" (*Averroes On Plato's Republic*, tr. R. Lerner [Ithaca, 1974], pp. 88, 92).

¹⁵ "[...] [I]ntellectus materialis est illud quod est in potentia omnes intentiones formarum materialium universalium [...]" (*LCDA*, III c.5, p. 387).

things of the world which are necessary contributing causes of its coming to have knowledge. For Averroes, such is not the case for the other separate intellects whose existence is asserted, not from reflections on human knowing and its necessary entailments in the Science of the Soul, but from observations and conclusions of the Natural Sciences of Physics and Cosmology. Hence, secondly, we must note that Averroes concludes from this not merely that potency can legitimately be understood to be part of the Material Intellect, but rather that potency, in particular potency for knowing, may legitimately be included in an account of any intellect other than God in order to account for its nature and activities¹⁶.

SEPARATE INTELLECT IN AVERROES¹⁷

Herbert Davidson and others have pointed out that Averroes came to set aside the emanationist cosmology he held in the Epitome of the

¹⁶ It should be noted that Averroes does not care to draw the conclusion from his conception of the Active Intellect that active efficient causality is a concept compatible with the concept of separate intellect in general and so should be included in the nature of any separate intellect, even though such a conclusion would be isomorphic with his conclusion that potency is in all intellects since it is in the Material Intellect. This consideration highlights indirectly the fact that the analogy that concludes that there is potency in all intellects is weak. See below, note 27.

¹⁷ H.A. Wolfson's discussion of the issue of the plurality and distinction of separate substances in "The plurality of immovable movers in Aristotle and Averroes", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958): 233-53, makes it clear that an issue of great concern to Medieval thinkers who felt compelled to place the one God of Judeo-Christian-Islamic revelation above and *per se* distinct from all other realities was not of similar urgency to Aristotle. In order to avoid the difficulty of asserting a plurality of essentially co-equal deities, they needed to find some characteristic which *per se*, not *per accidens*, distinguished God from other separate intellects. He writes: "[...] [A]ccording to the mediaeval explanations there is some kind of distinction of prior and posterior in the immaterial movers themselves, whereas according to our explanation [of Aristotle] there is no distinction at all in the immaterial movers themselves; the distinction between them is only a distinction in their relation to things outside themselves – a distinction of external relation which, as we have shown, does not affect their nature. Now the assumption on the part of the mediaevals of a distinction of prior and posterior, whether that of cause or that of nobility, in the immaterial movers themselves has led to those endless questions as to whether that distinction does not after all imply a relationship of matter and form and also as to whether that relationship of matter and form is compatible with the initial assumption that these immovable movers are immaterial. But to assume, as we do, that the distinction between the immaterial movers is only a distinction in their relation to things outside themselves does not lead to any of those questions" (Wolfson, pp. 248-9).

Metaphysics and to adopt a cosmological scheme which continues to employ "the terminology of emanation in the *Tahāfut* [*al-Tahāfut*] largely as a metaphor", as Barry Kogan has described it¹⁸. In accord with astronomical observations and the Science of Cosmology, Averroes wishes to maintain that the cosmos is constructed in a hierarchy of celestial bodies and associated separate intellects which are the causes of the motions of these celestial bodies. These motions occur because of the activity of conceptualization by intellect¹⁹. The existence of the celestial bodies is confirmed by empirical observation, but the existence of their separate intellectual movers is something which is argued in Natural Science. This is the conclusion of an argument founded on the notions that infinite power cannot be contained in a finite body and that infinite power is what is required to account for the eternal motion essential to the nature of the celestial bodies²⁰. As Davidson puts it:

The heavens must instead be construed as a body of a completely different type, consisting in the association of a simple matter-like substratum in motion, and an independently existing immaterial form moving the substratum. The matter-like substratum exists *necessarily by virtue of itself*, and the form is a source of infinite power whereby the substratum moves eternally²¹.

While it is on the basis of these Aristotelian considerations and not because of an adoption of an explicitly Avicennian or Neoplatonic scheme of emanation that Averroes asserts the existence of a plurality of separate intellects, the description of this by Davidson casts the doctrine in Plotinian terms.

Averroes is suggesting that each intelligence has some stratum of existence in its own right, a stratum that one of his later works does expressly recognize as a quasi-material aspect of the incorporeal intelligence. The inchoate aspect of the intelligence eternally turns its intellectual gaze, as it were, upon the First Cause. The conception it thereby gains becomes its eternal form, the form through which it receives perfection in proportion to its rank in the hierarchy of existence. We may conjecture that, in Averroes'

¹⁸ B. Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation* (Albany, 1985) p. 252; H.A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect. Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 228ff.

¹⁹ See Averroès, *Tafsīr Mā ba'd at-tabi'at*, Book Lām, p. 1600; *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII*, XII, c.37, 319H; Genequand tr., p. 151.

²⁰ Davidson, *On Intellect*, p. 325.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

mature view, the soul of each celestial sphere receives its full measure of existence through its conception of the corresponding intelligence²².

This account, particularly with its metaphors of stratum, turning and gazing, does not convey with sufficient clarity the nature of the metaphysical considerations at stake. In his mature accounts which reject the use of the notion of efficient or creative causality in the realm of separate intelligences²³, these intelligences are characterized as simple, substantial, separate forms which are intelligible *per se*. They are intelligible and also intelligent, that is, they are intelligible entities in their own natures independent of any other knowers, for a form which exists in actuality as a separate principle has to be an intellect²⁴. As such, these should contain no potency whatsoever. The sort of receptive or passive potency attributed to the Material Intellect in its relation to the Agent Intellect by the Science of the Soul has no place here. In contrast to the Material Intellect which is in need of intentions from the sublunary realm for its actualization, these separate intellectual substances do not receive forms from outside themselves by the sort of efficient causality which takes place in the case of the Material Intellect. For the separate intellects which are self-identical in their being and their actuality of knowing to the extent that they do not literally receive anything from outside themselves, the attribution of receptive or passive potency does not follow. Certainly the activity of conceptualization by intellect (*taṣawwur bi-al-‘aql*, *ymaginatio* or *formatio per intellectum*) which is attributed by Averroes to the Material Intellect and to the celestial bodies somehow since they move by desire, cannot be attributed to the separate intellects except as an account of their own self-contained immanent activity.

The solution which Averroes proposes for these difficulties involves a reiteration of the doctrine of potency in separate substances but now as a doctrine of a potency for an immanent activity of knowing. In his Long Commentary on the *De anima* he writes,

as sensible being is divided into form and matter, intelligible being must be divided into things similar to these two, namely into something similar to form and into something similar to matter. This is [something] necessarily present in every separate intelligence which thinks something else. And if not, then there would be no multiplicity {410} in separate forms. And it was already explained in First Philosophy that there is no form absolutely free of

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 227-8. In a footnote Davidson suggests a comparison with Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.7.1 and 1.8.2.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-9.

²⁴ See Taylor, "Averroes on psychology and the principles of metaphysics", p. 27.

potency except the First Form which understands nothing outside Itself²⁵. Its essence is Its quiddity (*essentia eius est quidditas eius*). Other forms, however, are in some way different in quiddity and essence²⁶. If it were not for this genus of beings which we have come to know in the science of the soul, we could not understand multiplicity in separate things, to the extent that, unless we know here the nature of the intellect, we cannot know that the separate moving powers ought to be intellects²⁷.

But how are we to understand this since God too is separate intellect and yet separate intellect was said to contain potency? The solution seems to lie in the understanding of conceptualization by intellect, *taṣawwur bi-al-'aql* or *imaginatio* or *formatio per intellectum*. I suggest that in the case of the separate intellects, their true understanding of their own natures and being requires that they conceptualize themselves as related to something greater in being than themselves in reference to which their fullness of being is able to be measured. That is to say, they contain within their very knowing of themselves a reference to something outside of themselves, namely the First Form, the Final Cause of all, God. Their immanent activity of conceptualization by intellect does not contain only reference to themselves and as such is not solely determined by their own self-contained natures. To this extent they are not complete Monads, for their activity of self-conceptualization contains the awareness of something outside their natures, God. This, then, is the manner in which Averroes can say that a note of potency tied to the nature of their active knowing is contained in separate intellects other than God, insofar as they must refer to and so "receive" from God something of their self-knowing²⁸. This doctrine is put forth in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, when he writes:

²⁵ This "First Form" is God for Averroes.

²⁶ For Averroes God is pure actuality, *fa-innahu fi'lun maḥḍun* (Averroès, *Tafsir Mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at*, Book Lām c.37, p. 1599.7; Genequand tr., p. 151). Note, however, that the Latin translation omits this phrase. Cf. *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII*, XII c.37, fol. 319v G-H.

²⁷ LCDA, III c.5, pp. 409-10. My translation. This is why the study of the soul is more worthy and more noble than other studies and should precede others. It is through our understanding of intellect in ourselves that we are able to understand intellect in higher beings.

²⁸ In critique of Averroes, however, note that there is an equivocation in attributing potency to all intellects on the basis of the consideration of the Material Intellect, since, on Averroes' view, the potency in the Material Intellect is a passive potency for receiving by way of cogitations from particular human beings in conjunction with efficient causality from the Agent Intellect. The attribution of active immanent potency – not passive potency – to separate intellects is based on other considerations such as their nature as separate, immaterial intellectual and intelligent forms. Because of this equivocation it is not strictly correct that the potency discovered in the case of the Material Intellect can be

The difference between the First's understanding of Itself and the understanding of themselves which the rest of the intellects have is that the First Intellect understands Itself as existing through Itself, not as what is related to a cause, while the rest of the intellects understand themselves as being related to their cause so that plurality enters into these in this way. For it is not necessary that they all be in one grade of simplicity since they are not in a single grade in regard to the First Principle and none of them exists simply in the sense in which the First is simple, because the First is considered to exist by Itself, while they are in related existence²⁹.

And to distinguish the separate intellects other than the First Principle from one another, Averroes appeals to proximity to the First. Yet for immaterial entities such as these, proximity has to be understood in terms of simplicity of the activity which is one with their essences, that is, in terms of greater or lesser simplicity of their activity of understanding.

It is not necessary that the existence of the intellect and the intelligible in separate intellects as one and the same be such that they are all equal in simplicity. For [the philosophers] hold that in this notion the intellects surpass [one another] to greater or lesser degrees and that this [simplicity] exists in reality only in the First Intellect. The reason for this is that the essence of the First Intellect is subsistent *per se*, while the rest of the

said to be the same which is present in all separate intellects other than God. Those separate intellects may have potency but it is a potency of a radically different kind, an active immanent potency. This Averroes does perhaps because he needs a new understanding to account for the hierarchy of intelligences and the distinction of intelligences from God, that is, to avoid asserting a plurality of essentially co-equal deities. But this is an issue which I will have to pursue elsewhere.

²⁹ *Averroès, Tahafot at-tahafot*, ed. M. Bouyges, S.J. (Beirut, 1930), p. 204. My translation. See Appendix, item (iv) for the Arabic text. "[...] [T]he difference between the knowledge of the First Principle, as knowing itself, and the knowledge of the other principles, as knowing themselves, is that the First Principle thinks itself as existing by itself, not as being related to a cause, whereas the other intellects think themselves as related to their cause and in this way plurality is introduced into them. They need not all have the same degree of simplicity, since they are not of the same rank in relation to the First Principle and none of them is simple in the sense in which the First Principle is simple, because the First Principle is regarded as an existence by itself whereas they are in related existence". *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, translated by S. van den Bergh (London, 1969), p. 122; *Averroès, Tafsir Mā ba'd aṭ-ṭabi'at*, Book Lām, pp. 1696-7; *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libri XIII*, XII, c.51, 335 H; Genequand tr., pp. 192-3, where Averroes follows Aristotle in stressing that what requires something other than itself is less than the most excellent of all entities.

intellects understand by their essences that they subsist through [the First Intellect]³⁰.

In the case of God's knowing, He is completely free of both passive potency and active immanent potency since His knowing contains within itself all its references. Within His being and knowing there is no otherness. While the other separate intellects must conceptualize in an intellectual way something which is outside of their own natures, God need not and cannot carry out such an activity. Indeed, this doctrine entails that this sort of conceptualization by intellect is not an activity found in God since there is nothing other than Himself to conceptualize and His very conceptualizing is fully and completely identical to His being³¹. In this way for Averroes God

³⁰ *Averroès, Tahafot at-tahafot*, p. 204. My translation. See Appendix, item (v) for the Arabic text. "It does not follow from the fact that intellect and the thing known are identical in the separate intellects that they are all similar in simplicity, for in this, according to the philosophers, some are superior to others in a greater or lesser degree; absolute simplicity is only found in the First Intellect, and the reason is that the essence of the First Intellect is subsistent by itself, and the other intellects, when they think themselves, are conscious that they subsist by it [...]" (van den Bergh tr., p. 123). This understanding of God and separate intellect was followed by Siger of Brabant who relied on the account in Averroes' Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics* at Averroès, *Tafsir Mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at*, Book Lām, pp. 1704-6; *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum libri XIII*, XII, c.51, 336 G-M; Genequand tr., p. 196. Siger writes: "Certum est quod in intellectu sit aliqua potentia, cum non sit actus purus in fine simplicitatis, in quo non est aliqua compositio. Nam, si in actu primo esset compositio, in eo esset imperfectio, quia non potest componi ex duobus actibus: dicit enim Aristoteles septimo Metaphysicae quod actus separatur. Oporteret ergo quod componeretur ex materia et forma, vel ex uno actu materiali et reliquo formali, et sic in eo esset de potentia, cum in eo esset de imperfectio. Et propter hoc in actu primo, cum sit in fine simplicitatis, non potuit esse compositio. Alia vero omnia, quae a sua simplicitate recedunt, compositionem aliquam recipiunt. Dicit enim Dionysius quod monadem sequitur dyas, et Boethius, quod omne quod est citra Primum, habet suum quod est. Ideo cum intellectus a puro actu Primi recedat et simplicitate, oportet quod aliquam compositionem habeat" (*In tertium de anima*, Q.6, solutio, in *Siger de Brabant. Quaestiones in tertium de anima, De anima intellectiva, De aeternitate mundi*, ed. Bernardo Bazán [Louvain/Paris, 1972], pp. 18-19). This text is cited by R.C. Dales in the course of his discussion of Siger's understanding of the soul in *The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden, 1995), p. 135, n. 43.

³¹ On the issue of God's knowledge, see Th.-A. Druart, "Averroes on God's knowledge of being qua being", in P. Lockey (ed.), *Studies in Thomistic Theology* (Houston, 1995), pp. 175-205. Averroes does not hesitate to state that God's knowledge is radically different from that of all other entities and that it is neither universal nor particular. See *Averroès, Tahafot at-tahafot*, pp. 226-7; tr. van den Bergh, pp. 136-7; and Long Commentary on the *Metaphysics* at Averroès, *Tafsir Mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at*,

is no *primum inter pares* but rather the unique Final Cause of all and in no manner dependent upon another.

APPENDIX

(i) Averroes, *Talkhiṣ Mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a*, ed. 'U. Amin, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1958), 4.24, pp. 135-6. German translation by S. van den Bergh, *Die Epitome der Metaphysik des Averroes* (Leiden, 1924), p. 117.

واذ قد تبين هذا من أمر عدد هذه المبادئ، فلننظر أَى وجود وجودهم ، وعلى أَى جهة هم محركون ، وعلى كم نحوهم مبادئ لهذه الأجرام السماوية الالهية . والسبيل إلى الوقوف على ذلك هو أن نضع هنا ما تبين في علم النفس ؛ فإن أكثر المبادئ التي تستعمل هنا مأخوذة من ذلك العلم ، ولا سبيل بوجه إلى معرفة هذا الجنس من الوجود بما يخصه إلا بعد المعرفة بذلك العلم [...] .

(ii) "Omne enim habens figuram terminatam quod in loco movetur, est animatum necessario, et corpora coelestia sunt huiusmodi. Et haec est declaratio secunda quoniam utraque declaratio est declaratio quid. Demonstratio enim similiter in hac scientia fundata est super propositiones acceptas ex scientia naturali et divinali. Declaratum enim est in Physicis quod motor corporum coelestia non est in materia. Et declaratum est in libro De Anima quod illud quod est huiusmodi est intellectus. Et declaratum est in tractatu primo quod forma intelligibilis non movetur nisi secundum desyderium quod fit a suo intellectu. Quapropter necesse est ut habeat suum imaginatum et est corpus coeleste habens desyderium" (*Aristotelis De caelo cum Averrois Cordubensis commentariis in In Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentariis* [Venice, 1562], vol. V, II c.61, fol. 140 B-D.

In his Epitome of the *De caelo*, Averroes writes (*[Jawāmi'] Kitāb al-Samā' wa al-'ālam in Rasā'il Ibn Rushd* [Hyderabad, 1947], 41.16-19. This text is cited by G. Endress in "Averroes' *De Caelo*", p. 28):

[...] أيضا ان نبين انه متصور بالعقل مما تبين في العلم الالاهى وذلك انه قيل هنالك ان حركته انما هى بجهة الشوق الى محرك هو عقل وما هو بهذه الصفة فهو عن تصور عقلى ضرورة .

(iii) Averroès, *Tafsīr Mā ba'd at-ṭabī'at*, ed. M. Bouyges, S.J., 2nd ed., vol. II (Beirut, 1967), Book Lām c.36, p. 1593:

ومن هنا يظهر كل الظهور ان هذه الاجرام السماوية متنفسة وانه ليس لها من قوى النفس الا العقل والقوة الشوقية اعنى المحرك فى المكان وقد يظهر هذا مما اقله وذلك ان المحرك لهذه الاجرام السماوية قد تبين انه فى غير هيولى وانه صورة مفارقة فى الثامنة من السماع وتبين فى كتاب النفس ان الصور المفارقة هى عقل فيلزم من ذلك ان يكون هذا المحرك عقل وانه محرك من جهة انه فاعل للحركة ومن جهة انه غاية الحركة.

(iv) Averroès, *Tahafot at-tahafot*, ed. M. Bouyges, S.J. (Beirut, 1930), p. 204: [..] والفرق بين عقل الاول ذاته وسائر العقول ذواتها عندهم ان العقل الاول يعقل من ذاته معنى موجودا بذاته لا معنى ما مضافا الى علة وسائر العقول تعقل من ذواتها معنى مضافا الى علتها فيدخلها الكثرة من هذه الجهة فليس يلزم ان تكون كلها فى مرتبة واحدة من البساطة اذ كانت ليست فى مرتبة واحدة من الاضافة الى المبدأ الاول ولا واحد منها يوجد بسيطا بالمعنى الذى به الاول بسيط لان الاول معدود فى الوجود بذاته وهى فى الوجود المضاف.

(v) *Tahafot at-tahafot*, p. 204 :

فانه ليس يلزم من كون العقل والمعقول فى العقول المفارقة معنى واحدا بعينه ان تكون كلها تستوى فى البساطة فانهم يضعون ان هذا المعنى تتفاضل فيه العقول بالاقل والازيد وهو لا يوجد بالحقيقة الا فى العقل الاول والسبب فى ذلك ان العقل الاول ذاته قائمة بنفسها وسائر العقول تعقل من ذواتها انها قائمة به [..].