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Philosophy of Intellect in the *Long Commentary on the De anima* of Averroes

John Shannon Hendrix

This essay will present an interpretation of the philosophy of intellect of Averroes (1126–98) in the *Long Commentary on the De anima*, by examining how Averroes expands on the *De anima* of Aristotle; by evaluating the commentaries on Averroes by F. Brentano (1838–1917), P. Merlan (1897–1968), H. A. Davidson and R. C. Taylor; by suggesting precedents for the thought of Averroes in the *Enneads* of the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus (204–70); by examining the possible influence of Averroes on the Scholastic philosopher Robert Grosseteste (1168–1253); and by suggesting Averroes' concept of material intellect as a predecessor to concepts in Transcendental Idealism and Structural Linguistics.

Averroes was “an excessive enthusiast of Aristotle,” in the words of Franz Brentano, “concerned to develop the latter’s pure doctrine.”¹ Nevertheless, his interpretation of Aristotle, considered to be “mystical,” his placing of the intellects outside the soul, taken to be a rejection of the immortality of the individual soul, led Thomas Aquinas to declare: “Non tam peripateticus quam peripateticae philosophiae depravator!”² In his *Long Commentary on the De anima*, Averroes posits three separate intelligences functioning in the *anima rationalis* or the rational soul: agent or active intellect (*intellectus agens*); material or passible intellect (*intellectus materialis*, *intellectus passibilis* or *intellectus possibilis*); and speculative intellect (*intellectus speculativus*), or actualized or acquired intellect (*intellectus adeptus*). In the *De anima* 3.1.5,³ “there are three parts of the intellect in the soul; the first is the receptive intellect, the second, the active intellect, and the third is actual intellection...,” that is, material, agent, and speculative.

This is based on Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle's *De anima* 3.5.430a, 10–15.⁴ While Aristotle located both material and active intellects in the soul, Averroes locates only their *functions* in the soul, while the intellects themselves are eternal substances.⁵ Not wanting to be inconsistent with Aristotle, thought requires both the activity of the active intellect and the receptivity of the material intellect, according to Averroes. The result, though,

is that the “first principles of thought”⁶ are given without an act of will, but the active intellect can be induced through the active will to illuminate the material intellect and images in the imaginative faculty, the *formae imaginativae* or *phantasmata* in the *imaginatio*. The passible intellect of Aristotle (*De anima* 3.5.430a24) is a “sensory power,”⁷ and Averroes connects it to both imagination and cognition (*virtus cogitativa*), as Franz Brentano explains in *The Psychology of Aristotle*.

While material intellect is “partly generable and corruptible, partly eternal,” corporeal and incorporeal, the active intellect is purely eternal and incorporeal. Active intellect is the final entelechy, or final actualization of potentiality. Material intellect is a possible intellect, a possibility, because it is both corporeal and incorporeal, thus neither corporeal nor incorporeal, a controversial position taken by Averroes which is difficult to rationalize. Material intellect becomes actualized intellect, or “energized” intellect in the analysis of Philip Merlan in *Monopsychism Mysticism Metaconsciousness*,⁸ through the affect of the agent intellect, which illuminates, as a First Cause, the intelligible *species*, the *species apprehensibilis* or *forma imaginativa*, the residue of the *species sensibilis*, the sensation or sensible form, in the *anima rationalis* or soul. The illuminated *species apprehensibilis* or intelligible acts on material intellect until material intellect becomes actualized or energized intellect, at which point intellect is able to act on the intelligible. In the words of Merlan, “material intelligence becomes transformed into what Averroes calls speculative intelligence.” The speculative intelligence of Averroes is identical to the productive intelligence of Alexander of Aphrodisias.

When the development of the *intellectus speculativus* is complete, it is perfected through active intellect.⁹ Averroes does not fully explain how the two intellects can be connected in this way, beyond the mediating role of the imaginative faculty. This problem is explored in detail by Paul Sidney Christ in *The Psychology of the Active Intellect of Averroes*. Averroes fails to reconcile the material (hylic) and active intellects posited by Aristotle. For Plotinus and previous commentators on Aristotle, the explanation is given as the pneumatic, but this is not given in Averroes. Both material and speculative intelligence are seen as being immortal, but the immortality is compromised by the perishability of the *formae imaginativae* in the *imaginatio*, the mechanism by which the material intellect is actualized.¹⁰

The *formae imaginativae*, as the basis of actualized intellect, are both corporeal and incorporeal; they bridge the gap or merge the two in the proc-

ess of intellection. The *formae imaginativae*, like the sensations of which they are residues, are partially connected to the material or corporeal, and cannot be archetypes from without, but intelligibles within human intellect. The affect of active intellect on material intellect toward actualized intellect is a combination of the illumination and the resulting mechanisms of *intellectus speculativus*. The affect is in the combination of the receptivity of material intellect as a passive substratum of cognitive and intellectual activity, like a blank tablet, and the will or desire on the part of the thinking subject to develop cognitive and intellectual *virtus*.

In his *De anima* (3.7.431b2), Aristotle wrote that the human intellect thinks the forms in images. Aristotle compared the active intellect (*nous*) to light itself, in relation to the potential intellect, what can be taken as *ratio* or discursive reason, as “in a sense light makes potential colours into actual colours” (3.5.430a10–25).¹¹ Aristotle contrasted the active or productive intellect, *nous poietikos*, with the potential or passive intellect, *nous pathetikos*. The active intellect illuminates what is intelligible in the sensible world. For Aristotle, *phantasia* or imagination is not part of intellect; it merely supplies intellect with the sensible form, which the intellect illuminates, as light makes potential colors actual, to form the intelligible form in active intellect.

In the *De anima* 3.7 of Aristotle, human intellect thinks the form or *species*, and processes it conceptually, as an image, which must be imprinted in the imaginative faculty. In 3.4, the sensible object is related to sense perception as the form of the object is related to intellect, the intelligible form, in relation to sensible form as it is imprinted in the imagination through sense perception. The intellect is to what is intelligible as sense perception is to what is perceptible. The intellect is receptive of the form as an intelligible; it must think the form in order to perceive it. An object might be perceived as a sensible form alone, but in that way the object would be singular and individual, not part of a totality. In *De anima* 3.4, although the intellect receives a form as an imprint in sensation and becomes identical in thought with the form, the intellect is not affected or altered in any way by the form or the sense object connected with it.

The active intellect is “a cause which is productive...” (*De anima* 3.5.430a12). According to Aristotle, the intellect is passive in that it becomes all things, and active in that it makes all things. In the *De anima* (3.5.430a14–15), Aristotle distinguished between the quality of mind which is “what it is by virtue of becoming all things,” and the quality “which is

what it is by virtue of making all things,” the making of the actual from the potential. In the *De anima* of Aristotle, “in the individual, potential knowledge is in time prior to actual knowledge” (3.5.430a21–22). The active intellect illuminates the intelligible form in the sensible form (this double illumination can also be found in Plotinus), as formed by the imagination or *phantasia*, from the imprint in sense perception (as in Plotinus), which is then given to discursive reason, material intellect. *Phantasia* is composed of afterimages of sensations, mnemonic residues or traces in the *oculus mentis*. *Phantasia*, though it is not part of intellect, is necessary for the functioning of intellect.

In Averroes’ *De anima* 3.1.5, the existence of intelligibles or first principles in intellect, as they are understood in actualized intellect, “does not simply result from the reception of the object,” the sensible form in sense perception in material intellect, “but consists in attention to, or perception of, the represented forms...,” the cognition of the forms in actualized intellect wherein they can be understood as intelligibles, which requires both the participation of active intellect and the motivation of the individual for intellectual development. This was also described by Plotinus. The goal of intellectual development for Averroes is to achieve union with active intellect, the final entelechy, and through this union the highest bliss in life can be achieved. Such bliss can only be achieved “in the eve of life.”

Material intellect, in that it is only a possibility, contains neither actual intellectual cognition nor a faculty for intellectual cognition. Both of these are only possible in actualized intellect, through *intellectus speculativus*, acquired intellect, and the affect of agent intellect. Material intellect contains only the possibility of being united with active intellect; all material intellects are equally potential. While they are all part of “the single transcendent material intellect shared by all human beings,”¹² as described by Richard C. Taylor, the power of the material intellect in Averroes’ thought should not be overestimated. *Intellectus speculativus* is developed as the *oculus mentis* of the *anima rationalis* develops a vocabulary of images or *phantasmata* stored in the *imaginatio* or *phantasia*. The phantasm is corporeal, and potentially intelligible, as the material intellect has the potential to understand the intelligible. The sensible form can only potentially be an intelligible form if it is predetermined by the intelligible form. In the *De anima* 3.5.36,¹³ “this sort of action,” of the active intellect, “which consists in generating intelligibles and actualizing them, exists in us prior to the action of the intellect,” prior to the formation of the perceived form in *imaginatio*. The corporeal

condition of material intellect acts as a substrate for actualized and agent intellect, the partially and completely incorporeal, only as a blank tablet on which letters are written. The corporeal presence of the letters, the sensible forms in *phantasia*, is predetermined by the writing of the letters, based on the idea of the letter, the intelligible form, which pre-exists the letter itself.

The material intellect alone for Averroes differentiates the human being from other animals, not in its potential for intellect but in its sensory powers, the *intellectus passibilis* of Aristotle. The *intellectus passibilis* is able to distinguish and compare individual sensory representations in the *virtus aestimativa* or *virtus cogitativa*, which provides the material substrate for *intellectus speculativus*. The *virtus aestimativa* or *virtus cogitativa* might also be ascribed to the *sensus communis*, common sense; they are both “perishable body powers”¹⁴ as described by Taylor. In distinguishing and comparing the *phantasmata* in *imaginatio*, intellect applies shape and form to otherwise nebulous, inchoate images. It also organizes them in totalities, in the most rudimentary processes of abstraction, and defines them in relation to organizational systems, such as geometry and mathematics. This is also described by Plotinus. Averroes suggests that the sensory powers themselves entail an element of intellection, in that the imprint of the sensible form would depend on the formation of the intelligible form.

In the *De anima* 3.1.7,¹⁵ “the cogitative faculty,” *virtus cogitativa*, “belongs to the genus of sensible faculties. But the imaginative and the cogitative and the recollective” faculties, *imaginatio*, *ratio* and *memoria*, “all cooperate in producing the image of the sensible thing,” the *species sensibilis*, “so that the separate rational faculty can perceive it,” as a reflected image in the *oculus mentis*, “and extract the universal intention,” the intelligible, “and finally receive, i.e., comprehend it.” In the words of Brentano, “Once they have done this, and once the activity of the active intellect has made the images intelligible, the material intellect, which stands to all intelligible forms in the relation of potentiality, receives from the images the concepts of sensible things.”¹⁶

The form and shape which intellect imposes on bodies are mechanisms of intellect in sense perception, as in Plotinus. As Averroes explains in the *De anima* 3.1.5,¹⁷ “It is necessary to assign two subjects to these actually existing intelligibles,” the intelligible as it exists in the form of the sensory object, “one of which is the subject due to which the intelligibles are true, i.e., forms, which are truthful images,” sensible forms; “the other, the subject due to which the intelligibles are only a single one of the entities in the world,

and this is the material intellect itself.” The intellect of the perceiving subject in sensory perception is as responsible for how the sensible world is perceived as the forms which are assigned to the sensible world.

The *Long Commentary* contains Averroes’ fullest account of the relation between active and material intellect.¹⁸ The sensible form in the *oculus mentis* exists as a potential intelligible, and the material intellect, which is engaged in the formation of the sensible form, is capable of receiving the intelligible from the active intellect. The active intellect makes what is potentially intelligible, actually intelligible. The material intellect is the passible intellect, *intellectus passibilis*, described by Aristotle in his *De anima* (3.5.430a24), which distinguishes and compares the individual representations of sense experience in the *oculus mentis*. Averroes also calls the passible intellect *virtus aestimativa* (a term used by Avicenna), and *virtus cogitativa* (a term used by Grosseteste). The *intellectus passibilis* should be distinguished from the *virtus aestimativa naturalis*, which is judgment by natural instinct, and can be found in all animals.

Averroes compares *intellectus passibilis* to *phantasia* or *imaginatio*, in *De anima* 3.1.20,¹⁹ the image-making *virtus* or power of intellect in the formation of the *phantasmata*. Following Aristotle, Averroes divides material intellect into the *sensus communis*, or sense perception, the *phantasia*, the *virtus cogitativa*, and *memoria*, in ascending order from corporeal to spiritual, as the active intellect is increasingly engaged. The material intellect cannot distinguish or apprehend intelligibles on its own. The material, passible intellect, becomes an acquired intellect, through the activities of *phantasia* and *memoria*, and it is based in the acquisition of habitual knowledge through exercise, *intellectus in habitu*, as a material *intellectus speculativus*. The passible intellect operates according to its capacity for receptivity, not according to an ability to form concepts or abstractions.

Intellectual knowledge for Averroes must be distinguished from the habitual knowledge of passible intellect. Intellectual knowledge is the product of the merging of the material intellect, which is considered to be incorporeal, despite its dependence on the sensible, and the active intellect, which transforms the sensible form into the intelligible form, stripping it of its corporeal attachment and converting it from a particular to a universal, which makes the potentially intelligible *phantasmata* in the *oculus mentis* intelligible. The *intellectus agens* is the intellect which acts, which moves the material intellect, the intellect which only receives or is affected, as described in *De anima* 3.1.5. The active intellect allows the material intellect to be moved

by imagination. The *intellectus passibilis*, as *virtus cogitativa* in combination with *phantasia* and *memoria*, forms the phantasm in order that it can be perceived by the active intellect, and prepares it to receive the active intellect, by which the sensible becomes the intelligible, which can be comprehended as a universal.

In the *De anima* of Averroes, the transformation from potentiality to actuality takes place in the speculative intellect, which includes the *intellectus in habitu*, and is distinguished from the agent or productive intellect, *intellectus agens*, and the material or passible intellect, *intellectus passibilis*.²⁰ The actualizing of the material intellect by the productive intellect is the result of the productive intellect illuminating the residues of sensations existing in the mind, the *formae imaginativae*, or mnemonic residues. The *formae* act on the material intellect after they have been illuminated, and material intellect is transformed into speculative intellect, which combines the material and productive intellects, the physical and eternal or archetypal, corporeal and incorporeal.

Averroes describes the material intellect as the transparent medium in relation to the active intellect, as light. In the relation between *nous* and discursive reason, the activity of the *intellectus agens* must precede that of the *intellectus materialis*. In the material intellect, individual representations are distinguished, in the *virtus aestimativa naturalis*. The material form is seen as color in relation to the light, resulting from the *intentio* in the imaginative faculty, or *phantasia*. In other words, as Averroes says in *De anima* 3.3.18,²¹ “the relation of the intentions in imagination to the material intellect is the same as the relation of the sensible to the senses.” The material intellect receives the active intellect in the same way that transparent bodies “receive light and colors at the same time; the light, however, brings forth the colors” (*De anima* 3.5.36).²² The intelligible form results from the cooperation of the material and active intellects. The active intellect “illuminates both the material intellect and images in the imaginative faculty of the soul,”²³ in the words of Davidson, an illumination induced through the exercise of the will.

For Averroes, light is the entelechy (*entelecheia*, actualization or *perfectio*) of the transparent medium, just as the active intellect is the entelechy of material intellect. Averroes follows Alfarabi in his explanation of light, but fails to distinguish between light and the source of light.²⁴ This nevertheless results in a new interpretation of light as entelechy on the part of Averroes, based on his interpretation of Aristotle. The transparent is not affected by color in any way unless it is illuminated, just as discursive reason is not af-

fectured in any way by intelligibles unless it is illuminated and perfected by the active intellect, the higher intellect or *nous*. When the material intellect is perfected by the agent intellect it is joined to it as an *adeptio* or acquisition, and the combination becomes *intellectus adeptus* or acquired intellect. Averroes sees the material intellect as a medium rather than an organ, enabling consciousness of intelligible thoughts, through the illumination of the *formae imaginativae* in the *imaginatio*.²⁵ The same function of *phantasia* was described by Plotinus.

Once the combination of the material intellect and the active intellect has formed the *species apprehensibilis* and allowed the *virtus cogitativa* to apprehend the intelligible, the concept and universal are able to play a role in cogitation. As Averroes says in *De anima* 3.3.18, when “the relation of the intentions in imagination to the material intellect is the same as the relation of the sensible to the senses, as Aristotle says, it is necessary to assume another mover which makes them actually move the material intellect, and this simply means that it makes actual thoughts by separating them from matter.” The *intellectus adeptus* produces the intelligible form when the *sensus communis*, *virtus cogitativa* and *imaginatio* in the *nous hylikos* establish a foundation in cooperation to provide material for the *intellectus adeptus*, which it then processes in relation to the active intellect. The intelligible form is a hybrid of the universal concept which is the product of the active intellect, and the sensible form, which is the product of sense perception and *imaginatio*. The intelligible form unites the *virtus cogitativa* with the active intellect, and sense perception with intellection.

The material intellect, *virtus cogitativa*, in that it is tied to the particulars of sense perception, is a singular entity in each individual, and cannot produce meaning or communication, cannot unite the cognitive faculties of each individual. The active intellect, on the other hand, in that it is capable of formulating intelligibles, which are incorporeal and not tied to the materials of individual sense perception, is able to unite particular individuals engaging in cognition in order to create a shared intellection which produces communication and meaning. This is sometimes referred to as “monopsychism,” and is also a basic proposition of Structural Linguistics in the twentieth century. In *De anima* 3.1.5,²⁶ “And since it has already been shown that the intellect cannot unite with all individuals by multiplying according to their number with respect to that part that is the opposite of intellect qua form,” material intellect, “the only thing that remains is that this intellect unites with all of us through the union with us of concepts or intentions pre-

sent to the mind...”. While the operation of the *virtus cogitativa* is particular to each individual, the intelligible form, which it receives from the active intellect, is universal and shared by every individual, as it is retained as a permanent archetype in intellection.

When the intelligible is received by the material intellect, it is subject to generation and corruption, multiplicity and accident. The intelligible form, when it is connected to the sensible form in material intellect, is not a permanent mnemonic residue as an archetype, but is fluctuating and impermanent in its corporeal manifestation. But the intelligible form does not disappear when its corresponding sensible form does, it merely ceases to participate in the sensible form. In *De anima* 3.1.5,²⁷ “And if intelligibles of this kind are considered, insofar as they have being *simpliciter* and not in respect of some individual,” as universals, “then it must truly be said of them that they have eternal being, and that they are not sometimes intelligibles and sometimes not, but that they always exist in the same manner...”. The intelligible form can participate in the sensible form, of its own volition, or the volition of the active intellect, but the sensible form cannot participate in the intelligible form, in its corporeal limitations, in the same way that color, for example, because it is tied to the corporeal body, cannot participate in light, although they are perceived simultaneously and are undifferentiated in perception.

Just because the sensible form is no longer visible in the *oculus mentis* does not mean that the intelligible form that is attached to it ceases to exist. The material intellect, in that it is incorporeal and eternal, also always has the potential to understand the intelligible, the abstract concept. Whether it does or not depends on the degree of union with active intellect and the degree of development of *virtus*, not on the level of potentiality. Material intellect is also always thinking; it is not capable of not thinking, which shows the presence of the eternal in it.

The material intellect of every individual is capable of receiving the intelligible form; individual material intellects receive intelligibles to varying degrees, depending on the extent to which the individual aspires to intelligible knowledge. It is not that the material intellect is not always thinking and does not always have the potential to receive intelligibles, it is just that it is not always united with active intellect. It is through the perfected union between the material intellect and the active intellect that intelligibles are apprehended, and that a beatific state can be achieved by the most complete apprehension of them as possible. Intelligibles come to material intellect naturally as first principles, as in the *proten entelecheian* of Aristotle, the

first entelechy, but any further intelligibles derived from the first principles require the volition of the material intellect. In *De anima* 3.5.36,²⁸ all individual material intellects are capable of receiving intelligibles naturally; the active intellect “is combined with us potentially whenever the speculative intelligibles are potentially present within us...”.

All individual material intellects are capable of some ability to form concepts and abstract ideas at a basic level, but beyond that intellectual development varies among individuals according to the level of volition (what Grosseteste would call *solertia*). The emphasis on individual will is a key element of Averroes’ thought. Intelligibles are apprehended the more completely as knowledge of the material world is greater, according to Averroes, as knowledge of sensible objects depends on knowledge of intelligibles. Complete knowledge of the material world results in complete unity between the material intellect and the active intellect, the final entelechy achieved in the “eve of life.”

Such an entelechy is the result of the process of active intellect combining “with us through conjoining the speculative intelligibles,” in the union of the sensible and intelligible, in stages of potentiality and actuality. The final entelechy requires actuality, in actualized intellect, *intellectus adeptus*, rather than potentiality, in material intellect, so the great mass of potentiality which defines the substratum of human material intellect must be overcome to a great degree, and takes a long time, an entire life. The reason why material intellect is only united with active intellect at the end, and not the beginning, is that “potency is part of us so long as there is in us form that exists only potentially,” which could be seen as an infinity. Knowledge and understanding are possible only in actualized intellect, which must no longer be potential intellect. Intellectual knowledge, and philosophy itself, which is eternal, as an intelligible, must be seen as the ultimate goal of human life, and the cause of the most perfect bliss.

Aristotle, in his *De anima*, defined light as a transparent medium. For Averroes, the material intellect receives intelligible thoughts as the transparent medium receives colors through illumination. As light makes colors visible to the eye, so light makes intelligibles understandable to the material intellect, discursive reason, resulting in abstract thoughts and concepts. Averroes sees the material intellect as a medium, as light is in the sensible world, an eternal substance independent of the mechanisms of the senses, as much as the active intellect. In the *De anima* of Averroes, intellect must be defined as unmixed, in particular as unmixed with the particulars of sense

experience and sense knowledge. Material intellect is not altered in any way by the reception of intellect, because, though it is connected to the body, it is not a body itself; it is more of a blank slate, as for Aristotle in *De anima* 3.4.429b30–430a10, the forms of thought “must be in it just as characters may be said to be on a writing-tablet on which as yet nothing actually stands written...”; material intellect is thus the “place of forms” as described by Aristotle in *De anima* 3.4.429a27–28.

For Averroes, following Aristotle, it is necessary that the material or receiving intellect be unmixed so that it can receive and understand all things. If material intellect were a form itself, then it could not receive a form. Material intellect is activated to the extent to which it is able to understand the forms of things which exist in actuality outside the rational soul, or the potential for thought. The rational soul, *anima rationalis*, considers the forms or *intentiones* which are in the imaginative faculty, and material intellect is activated in its process of abstracting forms from material things and creating first intelligibles, intelligibles in actuality derived from potentials in potentiality; in that way, intellect goes from being passive to being active. When intellect is moved by intelligibles, it is passive, but when intellect comes to move intelligibles, it is active; thus the *anima rationalis* consists of two distinct powers, the passive and active. Both powers are unmixed, incorporeal, neither generable nor corruptible.

In the *De anima* 3.5.36²⁹ of Averroes, “there are formed in the soul of man two parts of the intellect, one being that which *receives*,” and “another being that which *acts*,” the former being the material intellect, the latter being the actualized intellect, which “makes it the case that the intentions and concepts existing in the faculty of imagination,” as connected to the *phantasmata* in *imaginatio*, which are illuminated by active intellect, “actually move the material intellect, while previously they moved it only potentially...”. Further, “those two parts are neither generated nor corruptible” as corporeal, and “the relation of the active to the receptive intellect is just like the relation of form to matter.” The sensible impression, or *phantasma*, thus acts on matter in sense perception in material intellect, in the *virtus aestimativa* or *virtus cogitativa*, *dianoia*. Further, in the *De anima* 3.5.36,³⁰ there are “two modes of action” in intellect, “one of which belongs to the genus of *affections*” in material intellect, the other belonging to “the genus of *actions*” in actualized intellect, “whose function it is to abstract the forms and to strip them of matter, which is nothing other than making them into actual intelligibles, while previously they were only potential intelligibles,” the sensible

form made known as the intelligible form.

For Averroes, the *species* must be transformed in order for it to be received by material intellect, as in the *Liber Naturalis* of Avicenna; it must be differentiated as an intelligible in potentiality as opposed to an intelligible in actuality. Material intellect is not corporeal, in that it is capable of receiving corporeal forms, though it must be connected to the corporeal. As Taylor explains, “it is not possible for the material intellect itself to be a particular or definite individual entity, since the received intelligible would be contracted to the particular nature of its subject, the material intellect.”³¹ At the same time, material intellect cannot be composed of forms, in that it is capable of receiving sensible forms. Material intellect is thus neither matter nor simple form, form separable from body. It is capable of receiving the sensible form, and it is capable of producing the intelligible form, but it is neither matter nor intelligible itself, but rather an indefinable substrate for both.

Material intellect must be defined as being something in between the corporeal and incorporeal, as the mechanism which can connect the two. Material intellect cannot be seen to contain anything similar to the *species* or form which it is capable of receiving, but it can be seen to contain something similar to the genus of the *species* which it receives, and to the predication of the *species* which it receives. In other words, there must be a predisposition of the material intellect, while it is a power separate from the body, and has no material form which allows it to receive the sensible form, which is the a priori existence of the intelligible form which governs the perception of the sensible form and its transformation into an intelligible form in the process of abstraction and conceptualization in actualized or acquired intellect.

Averroes concludes that material intellect can only be defined as a possibility, as Aristotle said that it has only the nature of the possibility for receiving the intelligible forms, and that before it thinks, it does not exist. The material intelligible form, a seeming contradiction in terms, can only exist if the sensible form is seen as a manifestation of the intelligible form, or the intelligible form is seen as a precondition of the material form, and the material form does not exist outside of its conception based on the intelligible form. The material intelligible form, or universal material form, exists only as a potential concept, which is material intellect, which is potentially all of the concepts of universal material forms, and the material intelligible form exists only as actuality when it is understood by intellect.

Material intellect is capable of receiving universal forms, intelligibles, because of its partial separation from the corporeal, which contains only dif-

ferentiated forms, the particulars of sense perception, as also explained by Plotinus and Grosseteste. For Averroes, material intellect is not corporeal because it can distinguish between sensible particulars and universal forms; if it were corporeal it would not be able to do so, it would only be able to receive forms as differentiated and particular. As material intelligible forms, or universal material forms, exist in material intellect, they exist as speculative intelligibles which are generable and corruptible, subject to the mechanisms of intellect. This is possible because there must be a cause of the generation of the speculative intelligibles, something which allows material intellect to bridge the corporeal and incorporeal.

Averroes and Plotinus

Though Averroes is not generally considered to be sympathetic to Neoplatonic thinking, there are definite parallels between the philosophies of intellect of Averroes and Plotinus. Both can be considered to be “Idealists” in that intelligible form precedes sensible form in perception, and that the material intellect of Averroes or discursive reason of Plotinus, *nous hylikos* or *pathetikos*, depends in its functioning on the agent intellect of Averroes or Intellectual Principle of Plotinus, *nous poietikos*. The formation of the image in the *oculus mentis* is coincident with the formation of a thought, and the sensible form is a transient residue of the permanent intelligible form, as if it is reflected in a mirror and projected on a surface. For both philosophers, material intellect and intellect not connected to sense perception are mediated by a kind of *intellectus in habitu* (*intellectus speculativus*), a practicing intellect which leads the individual to higher forms of understanding. The development of *phantasmata* or imprints of forms in the *oculus mentis* in the imagination or *phantasia* is the product of a dialectical relation between the mechanisms of sense perception in material intellect and an a priori understanding of forms in the intelligible, prior to the sensible. In order to be perceived, forms must be constructed, in a structuring of reality. For both Plotinus and Averroes, the *formae imaginativae* or *phantasmata* in the *imaginatio* are the mechanisms by which material intellect or *dianoia* is actualized by agent intellect or *nous*.

In the *Enneads* of Plotinus, I.6.3,³² shape is not something which is inherent to objects in sensual reality, but is rather something which is imposed upon objects by human thought, in the nature of geometry and ordering principles. The sensible form given by the material intellect connected to sense

perception is already a product of intellection. The shape of the impression of the form of the object in Plotinus is something conceived, and joined to the material object before it is received as an impression; the shape of the object is part of the a priori vocabulary by which intellect orders the sensual world, and reaffirms the existence of the perceiving subject in the world. For Plotinus, “When sense-perception, then, sees the form in bodies binding and mastering the nature opposed to it, which is shapeless, and shape riding gloriously upon other shapes, it gathers into one that which appears dispersed and brings it back and takes it in, now without parts, to the soul’s interior and presents to it that which is within as something in tune with it...”. As for Averroes, the form and shape which intellect imposes on bodies are mechanisms of intellect in sense perception.

Sense perception transfers the form of the body or material entity, as conceptualized, according to Plotinus, “now without parts” (*Enneads* I.6.3); the perceived form must correspond to the preconception of it, the intelligible form. *Dianoia* or discursive reason, actualized material intellect, described as “the reasoning power in soul” in *Enneads* V.3.2, makes judgments about the sensible form given to it, which is already the product of judgments of the higher intellect, the Intellectual Principle, *nous poietikos*, the presence of active intellect in actualized intellect, and organizes them in combinations and divisions, corresponding to the principles of geometry and mathematics. As the *phantasmata* or imprints of forms come to reasoning power from intellect, “as for the things which come to it from Intellect, it observes what one might call their imprints...and it continues to acquire understanding as if by recognizing the new and recently arrived impressions and fitting them to those which have long been within it,” in “recollections of the soul,” according to Plotinus, as in an actualized intellect or *intellectus in habitu*. Perception is the product of experience in the interaction of thought and the sensible world, the dialectic of the incorporeal and corporeal, the universal and particular.

In *Enneads* V.3.3, if sense perception is to make the details of form explicit, “it is taking to pieces what the image-making power gave it,” and if it makes a judgment on the form, “its remark originates in what it knows through sense-perception, but what it says about this it has already from itself...”. Discursive reason in material intellect does nothing other than process images of forms which it has already defined itself, through the relation between active intellect and material intellect, Intellectual Principle and discursive reason. Without the capacity to understand the intelligible, the intel-

ligible form in relation to the sensible form, material intellect can only be unaware of the reality of the sensible world which is perceived, and unaware of the role that it plays in the formation and definition of the sensible world which it perceives as external to itself.

For Plotinus there can be no immediate sense perception of an object, without the mediation of the mirror reflection of the intelligible form of the object in intellect, the *forma imaginativa* of Averroes. In *Enneads* I.1.8, the intelligible form in intellect becomes the sensible form in sense perception, “not of itself and body, but abiding itself and giving images of itself, like a face seen in many mirrors,” in the same way that active intellect presents the intelligible to acquired intellect. Acquired intellect is only capable of receiving the intelligible to the extent of its limitations, as differentiated or sequentially arranged, in the same way that the mirror is only capable of receiving an image according to its corporeal state, adjusted in size and position.

The discerning of impressions printed upon the intellect by sensation for Plotinus is the function of discursive reason, not immediate sense perception. Since the sensual impressions in perception are copies and derivatives of intelligible forms, perception itself is a copy and derivative of reason. Reason in Plotinus is composed of mnemonic residues of perceived objects, what Plotinus calls “imprints” in “recollections” in *Enneads* V.3.2. Thoughts are propelled by the desire created by the multiple and fragmented images of perception as reconstructed in reason. In *Enneads* IV.7.6, sense perceptions merge together in reason like lines coming together from the circumference of the circle, from multiplicity to unity, subject to the ruling principles. In reality, sense objects are variable and differentiated in terms of size and location; they are multiple and fragmented, and it is only the reason of the perceiver which allows them to be apprehended as whole and congruent. Sense objects themselves cannot be immediately perceived as a congruent whole. Once the diverse and multiple sense objects have been transformed into a whole by apprehension in sense perception, they cannot return to their original state. Apprehension permanently transforms sensual reality in conformance with the principles of reason.

Perception, according to Plotinus, divides, multiplies, and otherwise organizes sensual reality; in other words, perception is an intellectual process. Perceived objects are divided and organized into parts which correspond directly to the organizational capacities of reason. The relation of parts and subdivisions to the whole and to infinity is the same in the sense object as it is in reasoning capacity. Geometry and mathematics are mechanisms by

which sensual reality is represented by perception to reason, though sense objects do not inherently contain geometrical and mathematical properties.

For Plotinus, discursive reason approaches *nous*, as material intellect approaches active intellect for Averroes, when reason recognizes its recent sense impressions and “gathers into one that which appears dispersed and brings it back and takes it in, now without parts,” the mnemonic residue or memory trace of previous sense impressions, in a process of reminiscence. In the *Enneads*, while perception grasps the “impressions produced by sensation on the living being” (I.1.7), through the mnemonic residue, a perception is “a mental image for that which is going to remember it” (IV.3.29), and the “memory and the retention of the object” belong to the “image-making power” or the imagination or *phantasia*. In the representation in the mnemonic residue, the intelligible form is present after the sensible form or perception is gone, as for Averroes. Through memory, “an image accompanies every mental act,” as described in *Enneads* IV.3.30. Through the intelligible form the intellectual act is without parts and has not come out into the open, but remains unobserved within, unknown to reason, suggesting the “unconscious” element of thought for which Plotinus is known, and which plays a role in the philosophy of Averroes.

Averroes and Grosseteste

Robert Grosseteste is believed to have known the *Long Commentary* of Averroes, translated into Latin c. 1220, as evidenced in works by Grosseteste such as the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* (c. 1230), and the *Hexaëmeron* (*On the Six Days of Creation*, 1237), written shortly before or at the time Grosseteste became Bishop of Lincoln.³³ In the *Hexaëmeron* (VIII, IV, 7),³⁴ the sensible form or *species sensibilis* is given by the intelligible form or *species apprehensibilis*, which is formed in the imagination or *phantasia* and is presented to discursive reason in the process of perception. The active intellect illuminates the *species apprehensibilis*, what is intelligible in the *species*, in the *species sensibilis* as formed by the *phantasia* or *imaginatio*, from the imprint in sense perception, which is then given to passive intellect. The *species apprehensibilis* is a similitude of the *species sensibilis*, as a mnemonic residue, and is thus a representation of the *species sensibilis*, which is itself a representation of the object to which its form corresponds (*Hexaëmeron* VIII, IV, 9–10).

In his *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* of Aristotle (I.14, 235–

38),³⁵ Grosseteste compares (but does not equate) *intelligentia*, divine intellect, to the *intellectus agens*, agent intellect, or *actio intellectus*, active intellect, the intellect which is differentiated from the passive, material intellect, in the *De anima* of Aristotle. Like the *actio intellectus* of Aristotle, the *intelligentia* of Grosseteste illuminates the lower functions of intellect, *virtus cogitativa* and *intellectus in habitu*, as described by Averroes in the *Long Commentary*. The mediating factor suggested by Averroes in the *De anima* of the *intellectus adeptus* or *speculativus*, between the active and material intellects, is not developed by Grosseteste, as it was by Averroes.

In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics* (II.6.17–21), universals (*principia*) exist in intellect potentially, and are activated to actuality, as in the *De anima* of Aristotle the potential, material intellect is activated by the *intellectus agens* (what Grosseteste calls the *virtus intellectiva*). For Grosseteste, sense knowledge plays a role in the activation of the material intellect. Sense perception is not the cause of knowledge, but rather is the condition by which knowledge is possible (I.18, 133–34). As in Aristotle, Plotinus and Averroes, reason, *virtus cogitativa* or *virtus scitiva*, apprehends the intelligible form as a singular or individual, while the *virtus intellectiva*, *actio intellectus* or *intellectus agens*, illuminated by *intelligentia*, apprehends the intelligible in its totality, as universal knowledge (I.18, 136, 164–65).

For Grosseteste, the active intellect is identified as the *virtus intellectiva* in combination with the *intelligentia*. Grosseteste follows Averroes as seeing the intelligible form, *species apprehensibilis*, formed by the *virtus intellectiva* in combination with the *intelligentia* (as active intellect). In Grosseteste the *virtus cogitativa* plays less of a role in the formation of the intelligible, given the *irradiatio spiritualis* of the *intelligentia*, reflecting the influence of Neoplatonic illumination theory in the interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine. In the *Enneads* (V.3.8), “And this light shining in the soul illuminates it; that is, it makes it intelligent; that is, it makes it like itself, the light above.” In the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, the *lux spiritualis* “floods over intelligible objects (*res intelligibiles*),” and “over the mind’s eye (*oculus mentis*),” and “stands to the interior eye (*oculus interior*) and to intelligible objects as the corporeal sun stands to the bodily eye and to visible corporeal objects” (I.17, 39–42),³⁶ following Aristotle, Plotinus and Averroes. For Grosseteste, the *lumen spiritualis*, light produced by the *lux spiritualis*, allows the mental sight, the *visus mentalis*, to apprehend the intelligible in the *virtus intellectiva*, as the light of the sun, the *lumen solare*, makes vision possible. The *lumen spiritualis* is the “first visible” in interior

sight, *visus interior*, as the colored body is the first thing receptive of the light of the sun, recalling Aristotle and Averroes.

Conclusion

Averroes, in the *Long Commentary on the De anima*, displays a connection to the thought of Plotinus, perhaps as filtered through the *Theology of Aristotle* or the *Fons Vitae* of Avicenna (Solomon Ibn Gabirol; translated by John Avendeth and Domenicus Gundissalinus, Canon of Segovia, c. 1150). The theory of knowledge by illumination promoted by Averroes is influenced by Neoplatonism; a similar view can be found in the *Fons Vitae*, the *De anima* of Gundissalinus, and the *De intellectu* of Alexander of Aphrodisias (who was known to have influenced Plotinus). Avicenna described the active intellect as a transcendent and incorporeal, cosmic intellect, illuminating the *anima rationalis*. Averroes suggests a kind of world soul in which individual souls participate, something also promoted by Plotinus. Subsequently, Averroes influenced the thinking of Latin scholastics in the concept of the active intellect as the incorporeal agent leading the potential, material intellect to actuality, a concept also found in Alexander of Aphrodisias and Avicenna. Robert Grosseteste may have also been influenced by the *Theology of Aristotle* or the *Fons Vitae*. According to Roger Bacon, Adam Marsh accepted the incorporeal active intellect as a divine intellect, as did Robert Grosseteste, who distinguished a divine or cosmic intellect, *intelligentia*, from an agent intellect, *virtus intellectiva*, which actualizes a material intellect, *virtus cogitativa* or *virtus scitiva*. This distinction can be found in the writings of Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, and John Peckham. These three writers, along with Grosseteste, Adam Marsh, and William of Auvergne, also see the divine intellect, the *intelligentia*, as illuminating the *anima rationalis*, in the *irradiatio spiritualis* of the *lumen spiritualis*, reflected spiritual light, in the synthesis of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic influences anticipated by Averroes.

Brentano and Merlan characterize Averroes as a mystic. Averroes expounds “eccentric mysticism” according to Brentano,³⁷ and a “neo-Aristotelian counterpart of the *unio mystica*,” which can be seen as rationalistic mysticism, involving a “flood of sheer light” and “absolute transparency” in intellect, according to Merlan.³⁸ But as Davidson points out, Averroes rejected the idea propagated by Avicenna that scientific knowledge can be attained through prophecy without following scientific procedures. For

Averroes, the three forms of prophecy, dreams, clairvoyance and revelation, are products of active intellect. Revelation and prophecy cannot be compared to reason as forms of scientific knowledge, a very un-mystical approach for a medieval philosopher. Ascension to active intellect in Averroes should be seen as a higher functioning of human intellect towards a unitary thought with universal laws governing the physical world, communicated by emanation, rather than as the mystical ecstasy as characterized by Merlan. The suggestion of the mystical aspect obscures the importance of Averroes' rationalistic philosophy of intellect, a philosophy which lays foundations for Scholastics to Idealists to twentieth-century Structural Linguistics.

The dialectic of the material and active intellects, between the individual particulars of sense experience in the *intellectus passibilis* and the universal matrix into which they are inserted and actualized, to participate in intellect, plays a role in the *Vorstellung* (picture thinking) of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and the concept of *la langue* (the matrix of rules that govern language in synchronic linguistics) in the *Course in General Linguistics* of Ferdinand de Saussure. For example, in the *Phenomenology*, *Vorstellung* is the “synthetic combination of sensuous immediacy and its universality or Thought.”³⁹ According to Saussure, “synchronic linguistics will be concerned with the logical and psychological relations that bind together coexisting terms and form a system in the collective mind of the speakers...” (*la langue*).⁴⁰ Echoes of Averroes can be heard in both of these concepts.

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¹ Franz Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle: In Particular His Doctrine of the Active Intellect* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 11.

² *Ibid.*, p. 12, quoting Aquinas' *Opusculum* 15: "De unitate intellectus contra Averoistas Parisiensis," in Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula Omnia*, ed. R. P. Perrier (Paris: Lethielleux, 1949), pp. 70–120.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11, n. 55, 3.1.5, Fol. 165a, in Crawford p. 406, see Taylor p. 322.

⁴ Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 317.

- ⁵ Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle*, p. 9.
- ⁶ Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, p. 320.
- ⁷ Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle*, p. 9.
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- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10, n. 51, 3.1.5, Fol. 163b, in Crawford p. 400, see Taylor p. 316.
- ¹⁸ Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, p. 317.
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- ²¹ Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle*, p. 10, n. 50, 3.3.18, Fol. 169b, in Crawford pp. 438–39, see Taylor p. 351.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 12, n. 59, 3.5.36, Fol. 179b, in Crawford p. 499, see Taylor p. 398.
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³¹ Richard C. Taylor, “Averroes: religious dialectic and Aristotelian philosophical thought,” in Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, p. 192.

³² Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

³³ On Grosseteste see John Shannon Hendrix, *Robert Grosseteste: Philosophy of Intellect and Vision* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2010).

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³⁷ Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle*, p. 12.

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