

AVERROES' THREE COMMENTARIES ON *DE ANIMA*

ALFRED L. IVRY
(New York University)

The three commentaries which Averroes wrote on Aristotle's *De anima* are among his most important and interesting works, not least for the different destinies they had.¹ While his philosophical work received scant attention in the Muslim world, Jewish and Christian scholars took avidly to them, his commentaries on Aristotle accompanying if not replacing the Stagirite's own compositions.

In the case of the *De anima* commentaries, the *Epitome* was known to both Jews and Christians, but only the *Middle Commentary* was known to Jewish scholars, mostly in Hebrew translation, while the Scholastic world had only the *Long Commentary*, in Latin translation.² The view of each commentary was discussed by the community which had it, in ignorance of the other work. Now that critical editions of all three are available, critical understanding of them will be enhanced, and comparisons between them facilitated.³ It is no longer necessary to present each commentary by itself, as though it existed in a vacuum.

This comparative approach offers a different perspective on

¹ For these different destinies, see Harry A. Wolfson, "The Twice-Revealed Averroes," in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, ed. I. Twersky and G.H. Williams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1973), I:371–386; F. Van Steenberghen, "Le Problème de l'Entrée d'Averroès en Occident," in *L'Averroïsme in Italia* (Rome, 1979), pp. 81–89; A.L. Ivry, "Averroes and the West: The First Encounter/Non-encounter," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture*, ed. R. Link-Salinger et al. (Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 153–158.

² The Long Commentary did receive a Hebrew translation, from the Latin, in the fifteenth century, but it was not much used. Cf. H. Wolfson's study of this translation in the appendix to his "Plan for the Publication of a *Corpus Commentariorum Averrois in Aristotelem*," in *Studies*, I:448, 454.

³ Cf. the extensive list of earlier studies of these commentaries prepared by J. Vennebusch, "Zur Bibliographie des psychologischen Schrifttums des Averroes," *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* 6 (1964): 92–100. Among the more recent studies, see the introduction in Helmut Gätje, *Das Kapitel über das Begehren aus dem mittleren Kommentar des Averroes zur Schrift über die Seele* (Amsterdam, 1985), pp. 23ff.; Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect* (New York: Oxford, 1992), pp. 258–298.

Averroes' views, showing not only what he chose to mention, but also what he omitted to mention. While it is always impossible to know for sure why a given view does not appear, the comparative approach may offer highly plausible reasons for its absence. It is thus possible to construct two descriptions of a given work, one of it by itself, alone, and one in relation to the other commentaries.

It would seem clear that the latter approach is more in keeping with Averroes' own predilections, since he often refers in his writings to other works of his, as well as of others. In writing more than once on a given Aristotelian work, he would not have been unaware or indifferent to what he had said previously, and discrepancies may well have their reason.

In the case of *De anima*, the *Epitome* differs with the other two commentaries seem clear. The *Epitome* is more of a summary of the topic being discussed than it is an actual textual commentary, and Averroes' orientation is more physiological than anything else.⁴ The *Middle* and *Long* commentaries are similar in style, the *Middle* more of a paraphrase and more politically discreet than the *Long*.⁵

⁴ Cf. the editions of the *Epitome* prepared by A.F. Al-Ahwānī, *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Nafs* (Cairo, 1950), and S. Gómez Nogales, *Epitome De Anima* (Madrid, 1985). See too the Spanish translation of Gómez Nogales, *La Psicología de Averroes: Comentario al libro sobre el alma de Aristoteles* (Madrid, 1987). See the analysis of this work and other epitomes found in Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Averroes: the Commentator and the Commentators," in *Aristotle in Late Antiquity*, ed. L.P. Schrenk (Washington, D.C., 1994), pp. 187–197. Cf. too Davidson, *On Intellect*, pp. 258–298, and Ivry, "Averroes' Short Commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*," in *Documenti E Studi Sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale VIII* (1997), pp. 511–549.

⁵ Critical editions now exist of both commentaries. Cf. F. Stuart Crawford, ed., *Averrois Cordubensis: Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima Libros* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953); A.L. Ivry, ed., *Abū al-Walīd ibn Rushd: Talkhīṣ kitāb al-Nafs li-Aristū* (Cairo: Conseil Supérieur de la Culture, 1994). I am also preparing an English translation of the *Middle Commentary*, while Richard Taylor is doing the same for the *Long*. Professor Taylor has generously shared his thoughts and work on the *Long Commentary* with me, and I am pleased to acknowledge my debt to him. I have previously summarized my thoughts comparing the two commentaries in "Averroes' Middle and Long Commentaries on the *De Anima*," *Arabic sciences and philosophy*, vol. 5 (1995), pp. 75–92. Herbert A. Davidson has written a rebuttal of my arguments, to which I have written a brief response. Cf. Davidson, "The Relation Between Averroes' Middle and Long Commentaries on the *De Anima*," *Arabic sciences and philosophy*, vol. 7 (1997), pp. 139–151; Ivry, "Response," pp. 153–155. This present article is in many ways a further response to Davidson's position, presented earlier in his *On Intellect* (above, note 3). Another response, to both my article and to Davidson's book, has been written by A. Elamrani-Jamal, who kindly shared it with me in pre-print form (as Davidson had likewise done with his article). Cf. Elamrani-Jamal, "Averroès: La

Both are interested in what may be called physical psychology, and offer what appears to be contrasting solutions to the epistemological problems caused by Aristotle's theory of the intellect. As Averroes' theory or theories of the intellect are one of the most compelling features of his philosophy, and one which had great historical impact in the West, our comparison of the three commentaries will concentrate on this area of his thought.⁶

The doctrine of the intellect in the *Middle Commentary* in itself is relatively straightforward and comprehensible, particularly in comparison with the lengthy ruminations of the *Long Commentary*. In good part, this is due to Averroes' methodology in the *Middle Commentary*, in which he stays close to Aristotle's text and refrains generally from exploring the entailments and post-Aristotelian additions to the text.

Thus, the *Middle Commentary* discusses the intellect in its core Aristotelian divisions only, relating to its passive and active features. Averroes here either does not mention, or barely mentions, a number of key aspects of intellection which were identified by others, and by Averroes himself, elsewhere. Such are the "cognitive" power of the soul, as well as the intellect in its "passible," "habitual" and "acquired" states.⁷ Noticeably missing as well from the *Middle Commentary* is any discussion of conjunction, that joining of the individual intellect with the Agent Intellect which is the goal and perfection of intellection.⁸ Following this, it is not surprising that Averroes is also very reticent concerning the possibility of immortality which conjunction may provide, though following

doctrine de l'intellect matériel dans le *Commentaire Moyen* au *De Anima* d'Aristote, présentation et traduction, suivie d'un lexique-index du chapitre 3, livre III: *de la faculté rationnelle*," in *Langages et philosophie: hommage à Jean Jolivet*, ed. Alain de Libera, Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal and Alain Galonnier (Paris, 1997), pp. 281–307.

⁶ Besides Davidson's work on this topic, see also Arthur Hyman, "Aristotle's Theory of the Intellect and Its Interpretation by Averroes," in *Studies in Aristotle*, ed. D.J. O'Meara (Washington, D.C., 1981), pp. 161–191, and cf. p. 164, note 6 for previous studies of this theme.

⁷ The "passible intellect" (for which see below, p. 213) is absent from the *Middle Commentary*, the one mention of the term in Arabic (*al-'aql al-munfa'il*) used just as a synonym for the material intellect. Cf. my edition of the Arabic *Middle Commentary*, (to which all future references also pertain), 123.6. The Arabic equivalents of the *intellectus in habitu* and *intellectus adeptus* are also missing from the *Middle Commentary*, the "habitual" intellect only alluded to, at 126.5. Cogitation (*fikr*) is mentioned a few times, but without special significance, and see below, p. 202.

⁸ Cf. the brief reference to conjunction in the *Middle Commentary*, 130.13.

Aristotle he does make a negative assessment of personal immortality.⁹

Averroes does use terms in the *Middle Commentary* which he has not defined, taking them often from the translations of the *De anima* which he used. The reader may well wonder in these cases whether the word has any of the special significance he gives it in the *Long Commentary*. *Fikr* (cogitation), for example, is used sparingly in the *Middle Commentary*, in one place in association with deliberate and critical thinking, in another place along with other "corporeal" powers, such as sensation, pleasure and pain;¹⁰ but its significance in the process of abstracting intelligibles from imaginative forms, given these features, is nowhere brought out, as it is in the *Long Commentary*.

One should, I believe, assume Averroes deliberately restricted his discussion of this and the other abovementioned terms and concepts in the *Middle Commentary*, while fully aware of their significance for a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the nature of intellection. He apparently considered such detailed exposition not necessary for an essential understanding of the topic, particularly as formulated by Aristotle. Averroes' main concern in the *Middle Commentary* is to present Aristotle's text in a manner accessible to the audience for which it was written, a lay if regal audience, and for that reason to present it in as uncomplicated a manner as is possible.¹¹ His own understanding of the subject went beyond that which he communicated explicitly to his *Middle Commentary* readers, though that understanding underlays his presentation and surfaces in passing remarks and unexamined terms dropped into the discussion.

It is through comparison with his views on the intellect in his *Epitome* and *Long Commentary* that we can state with confidence that Averroes refrained in the *Middle Commentary* from giving that full exposition of the subject which he could have conveyed. And it is this perspective which permits us to sketch his *Middle Commentary*

⁹ *Middle Commentary*, 130.11, and see *De anima* III 5, 430a20.

¹⁰ *Middle Commentary*, 37.13, 139.4.

¹¹ Cf. the description of Averroes' audience with the caliph which brought him the commission to comment on Aristotle's works, as found in George Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London, 1967), p. 12f.

position fully, capitalizing on every term and allusion employed in that work, however briefly.

In reading his *Epitome*, his first essay on the *De anima*, we learn that Averroes was familiar with and had accepted the traditional divisions of the human intellect which had long since been read into — or out of — Aristotle's exposition of Book III, chapters four and five of that work. Thus, he mentions the "hylic intellect," as the first stage of the potential intellect was called; the intellect *in habitu* (*al-'aql bi'l-malakah*), identified as the "perfection" (*kamāl*) of the hylic intellect; and the intellect which is said to bring the other(s) from potentiality to actuality, *al-'aql al-fā'āl*.¹² This is the efficient or active intellect, that which is elsewhere (though not in the *Epitome*) called the intellect *in actu*, *al-'aql bi'l-fī'l*. This last is not to be confused with *al-'aql al-fā'il*, the Agent Intellect, which is treated elsewhere in the *Epitome* as an eternally active separate substance.¹³

It is through the agency of the Agent Intellect that the intellect in us, in all its divisions, is perfected or actualized, reaching ultimately the stage of *'aql mustafād* or acquired intellect; at which time it is said to be in a state of conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with the Agent Intellect. Following Alexander, Averroes says that the acquired intellect is the Agent Intellect, an identification which elsewhere allows him to say that the Agent Intellect is our "final form."

These terms and concepts which Averroes mentions briefly in the *Epitome* recur, at greater length and in Latin, in the *Long Commentary*. Where they are missing from the *Middle Commentary*, then, there is little reason to assume Averroes was unaware of them. He had no quarrel with these divisions of the intellect, or with the entire process of intellection and conjunction as sketched already in the *Epitome* and elaborated upon in the *Long Commentary*.

The one part of this process with which Averroes had difficulty was the material intellect, the nature and location of which troubled him through much of his career, causing him to offer different assessments of it at different times. In the *Middle Commentary*, the active and passive aspects of the intellect explicitly emerge as just that, aspects of the same entity. In one sense they both are "in"

¹² Cf. the *Epitome* editions of Al-Ahwānī, p. 85, Gómez Nogales, p.123, and his Spanish translation, p. 209.

¹³ Al-Ahwānī, p. 89, Gómez Nogales, p. 127, *Psicología*, p. 213; cf. too Al-Ahwānī, p. 8, Gómez Nogales, p.10, *Psicología*, p. 103.

us, in another sense neither is. Following Aristotle, Averroes treats each aspect separately, giving the impression at times of regarding the material intellect as distinct substantially from the Agent Intellect. In like manner, he expounds separately on the interpretations of the material intellect given by Alexander of Aphrodisias and Themistius, seemingly identifying with each one when giving their views. This has caused Herbert Davidson to consider the present text of the *Middle Commentary* as containing a later revision, or "excursus," in which Averroes supposedly changed his viewpoint from one which favored Alexander initially.¹⁴

Our understanding of Averroes' commentary style does not lead to this conclusion, however. Whatever his personal feeling on an issue, he tends to present the views of philosophers he respects so well as to appear often to be in agreement with them; a case in point being his commentary on Plato's *Republic*.¹⁵ In the *Middle Commentary*, Averroes offers his own view of the material intellect in due course, and is quite explicit in preferring his synthesis of Alexander's and Themistius' views to either one's position in itself.

Following a common tradition which has its origins in Alexander of Aphrodisias, the Agent Intellect is accepted without question by Averroes as a separate celestial substance, functioning as a kind of guarantor for the intelligible nature of all forms on earth, including, and especially, the rational or intelligent faculty in humans.¹⁶ That faculty appears to be innate to human beings, but is in fact on loan, as it were, from the Agent Intellect. As Averroes puts it in the *Middle Commentary*, the material intellect, which represents the potentiality for rational thinking, and as such is the first expression of this faculty in an individual, is connected "incidentally" (*bi'l-'arad*) to the human soul, belonging "essentially" to the universal Agent Intellect.¹⁷ The material intellect is thus a

¹⁴ *On Intellect*, p. 276. See though Elamrani-Jamal's interpretation of this section, in the article mentioned above, note 5, pp. 284–289.

¹⁵ Nowhere in this work does Averroes take exception to Plato's remarks, however scandalous many of them would have seemed to Muslim readers. See *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* translated by Ralph Lerner (Ithaca and London: Cornell, 1974).

¹⁶ The cosmology which underlies Averroes' understanding of the Agent Intellect is discussed in his commentaries on the *Metaphysics* and elsewhere, and is missing from all three commentaries on *De anima*. Cf. Davidson, *On Intellect*, pp. 220–257.

¹⁷ *Middle Commentary*, 125.8.

temporary instantiation of that eternal and always actual intellect, our “first perfection”; even as the Agent Intellect is our ultimate perfection or “final form.”¹⁸

With Alexander, Averroes believes in the *Middle Commentary* that the material or potential intellect is best understood as a disposition or ability of the human soul to represent imaginative forms intellectually. The material intellect, accordingly, relates to the intelligible or ideal dimension of imaginative forms, a dimension which these forms always possess, but only potentially at first. They await an intelligent mind to bring them to actuality by thinking them, even as the potentially intelligent mind requires some active stimulation to become receptive.

This intelligible aspect of the imaginative forms is called by Averroes in Arabic a *maʿnā* (pl., *maʿānī*), a word with many applications, basically a “thing,” but in this context, and following the Latin, best rendered as “intention.” Thus, the material intellect receives the (intelligible) intention of the imaginative form, not the imaginative form itself, and the intellect is thereby considered able to keep its distance from the particularity and corporeality, i.e., the physical dimensionality, of the imaginative form itself.

Averroes is mainly concerned in this subject to safeguard the objectivity and hence accuracy of our thinking, on the one hand, and to explain its individuation, on the other. The objectivity of our thoughts is assured, Averroes believes, by the essential separation of our rational faculty from the other faculties of the soul. These other faculties, the nutritive, sensory and imaginative faculties, are regarded as dependent upon and affected by physical, material reality, both that which is external to the person, and that which is intrinsic to the body in which the soul resides. These other faculties of the soul are thus implicated in material and individual reality in a way which the intellect, beginning with its initial state of potentiality as the material intellect, is not.

The material intellect — or more literally, following Alexander of Aphrodisias, the “hylic” intellect — is “material” in the sense of potentiality only, matter for Aristotle and his followers being the locus of potentiality. Accordingly, the material intellect in the human being is the principle of potential intellection, a principle

¹⁸ *Middle Commentary*, 130.9.

which is given substantial form and reality by the Agent Intellect, and not by any of the other physically compromised faculties of the soul. The material intellect, and the rational faculty in general, is thus in the human soul and person, but not of them. It receives the potentially intelligible forms (or more precisely, the intelligible "intentions" contained in the imaginative forms) conveyed to it by the imaginative faculty without being affected by the particular representation of the forms which the imagination has conveyed. That particular imaginative representation reflects, either immediately or through memory's recollection, the particular sensation which an external sensible object has or had impressed upon the individual, and it is only at the level of the rational faculty that the abstracting of the universal from this particular image occurs.

The material intellect, therefore, must be fully immaterial and separate from anything physical in order to remain unaffected by particular, "corporeal" forms. Its "passive" nature is solely that of universal receptivity, it remains unaffected by and impassive to that which it receives, always (theoretically) able to receive new thoughts without distortion or bias caused by previous ones. As such, the activity of the intellect, particularly in its initial phase of representing or thinking the intelligible, is inerrant; the thoughts (of a healthy person) are always accurate, or "true."¹⁹

This "initial phase" of intellection involves the material intellect in that it is that entity which receives the forms, or rather intelligible intentions, of the imaginative faculty. In receiving these forms, the material intellect fulfills its peculiarly passive nature; but this passive nature is not sufficient, indeed it is in principle unable, to activate the mental process through which intellection occurs. Strictly speaking, the material intellect is merely the potentiality to think, the thinking act or intellection itself requiring an active agent. This is supplied, logically enough, by the Agent (or Active) Intellect, which activates the potential intellect, turning it into an intellect in act and thereby realizing the lifelong process of accumulating wisdom, i.e., acquiring a (temporary) individualized intellect.

The material intellect, consequently, stands to the Agent Intellect as matter to form, it supplies the basis upon which the Agent

¹⁹ *Middle Commentary*, 131.5, following *De anima* III 6, 430a26.

Intellect builds.²⁰ For Averroes, however, the Agent Intellect does not emanate its forms directly upon the material intellect of an individual, rather, like light upon an object,²¹ it “illuminates” or brings out the intelligible dimension of sensible forms, a dimension which is latent/potential as well in the forms of the sensory and imaginative faculties. The Agent Intellect is said to actualize these potential intelligibles external to the intellect, as well as to actualize the material intellect itself, that is, to bring it from potential to actual intellection.

This facilitating task of the Agent Intellect in the process of intellection is consequent upon its metaphysical role as the noetic principle of all sub-lunar being. It is the last such principle in the celestial hierarchy of beings, each sphere believed to have one such intellect responsible for its formal nature. Though the forms on earth are multiple, due to the many configurations of matter, as intelligible essences they all relate to the same Agent Intellect, which as such is their formal principle. As related to an intelligent and immaterial principle, likewise the being of these forms is both immaterial and intelligible. The intelligibility of all forms is the formal face which the essence of an object shows to the observer/thinker.

The material intellect by itself, however, does not — or should not — think, it merely has the capacity or “disposition” to do so. From the very beginning, the Agent Intellect has been involved in it, first in establishing it as the (potential) form of a human being, a rational animal, and then in actualizing its operation when it thinks. Thinking or conceptualizing (literally, “representing a form through the intellect,” *taṣawwur bi'l-ʿaql*) is thus an active as well as passive activity, consisting first in abstracting the essential and universal component from a particular imaginative form, and then in receiving it as an intelligible form, or thought.²²

Our thoughts are our own, though as “scientific” or abstract thoughts, dealing with which is the function of the theoretical aspect of intellect, they are also universal. The particular set of universal propositions which we acquire forms “our” accumulated

²⁰ *Middle Commentary*, 129.3, and compare the *Long Commentary*, 406.564.

²¹ *Middle Commentary*, 129.9; *Long Commentary*, 410, 411.

²² *Middle Commentary*, 129.15.

intellectual knowledge, the intellect *in habitu*.²³ This is a portion of the intelligible ideas in the universe, ideas which owe their nature to the Agent Intellect. Knowing them therefore brings us “closer” to the Agent Intellect, and ultimately affords a joining or “conjunction” (*ittiṣāl*) between the individual perfected or “acquired” intellect and the universal Agent Intellect. As the latter intellect is considered to be an eternal substance, so conjunction with it renders the intellect of the individual who achieves this state immortal also. However, this immortality is both impersonal, being constituted by universal propositions, and non-individualistic, since the acquired universal propositions which have conjoined with the Agent Intellect have in effect returned home and are absorbed in the totality of intelligible forms which is the Agent Intellect. Unlike Avicenna, Averroes does not believe the acquired intellect establishes an identity which can transcend the death of the individual, at most for Averroes one is granted a glimpse of eternity, of eternal truths, while alive.

As mentioned, the most significant difference between the *Middle Commentary* description of the intellect and that which is found in his other two commentaries on the *De anima* concerns Averroes’ view of the material intellect. In the *Epitome*, Averroes first considers it a disposition in the imaginative faculty to receive intelligible forms;²⁴ that is, the material intellect is considered to be a potential faculty in the imagination. This, since the imaginative faculty provides the imaginative forms the intelligible universal intentions of which the material intellect processes. The imaginative faculty, accordingly, serves as the matter or substrate for the material intellect, just as the organs of sensation are the substrate of the imaginative faculty, providing it with the imaginative intentions contained in sensory forms.

The *Epitome* consistently expresses the view that each “lower” faculty serves as the basis or “material substrate” for the next higher one; the “matter” an expression of both its physical condition, that of serving as a substratum; and as indicative of the potential status of its form. While actually a form may be sensible or imaginative, they are, potentially, imaginative or intelligible, respectively. The

²³ Though this stage of the intellect is not singled out as such in the *Middle Commentary*, as mentioned above.

²⁴ Al-Ahwānī, p. 86; Gómez Nogales, p. 124; *Psicologia*, p. 209.

potential intelligibility of the object is, of course, present from the beginning, latent already in the sensible forms. These forms, in the object itself, could thus be said to be the remote or indirect material substrate of the material intellect. Moreover, as the sensory forms are not intelligible in themselves, neither are the imaginative forms. The intelligible disposition in each, whether remote or proximate, is a potentiality which is brought to actuality by the next “higher” or more “noble” faculty, whereupon the original form is transformed.

The thread of intelligibility which in the *Epitome* runs through the formal component of every object at each stage in which a person perceives it is woven, then, with the material fabric of the object. The materiality of the “material intellect” in this construal is not just a function of the intellect, but is inherent in the physical structures of the perceiving object and subject.

At first, in the *Epitome*, Averroes believed the process of intellection required a corporeal anchorage of the sort described. Later, though, as he tells us in the *Epitome*,²⁵ he changed his mind, fearing the material intellect could not remain purely potential in itself and as such able to receive all intelligible forms, were it to be identified so closely with the forms of the imaginative faculty, a faculty possessing actual, and thus impressionable, forms. The imaginative forms, or their intentions, could remain the source or subject of the material intellect, but not its substrate. Their relation to the material intellect had to be comparable to the relation of a sensible form to sensation, as, e.g., the object of vision to sight, not that of the eye to sight. The “eye” of the intellect, its sustaining, substantive substantiality, has to be located elsewhere.

In the *Epitome*, Averroes does not tell us where that may be, only that the *Long Commentary* contains his true opinion of the issue, and whoever is interested in knowing that should consult that work.²⁶ The *Long Commentary* does indeed go into the issue of the material intellect at great length, expanding on the views of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and others, with Averroes offering finally a daring if problematic solution of his own to this topic.

The material intellect in the *Long Commentary* is now to be seen as its own substrate, as it were, no longer requiring another faculty

²⁵ Al-Ahwānī, p. 90, Gómez Nogales, p. 128, *Psicologia*, p. 213.

²⁶ Al-Ahwānī, p. 90; Gómez Nogales, p. 129; *Psicologia*, p. 214.

as its base, neither in the body nor in the heavens. It is now its own eternal substance, comparable in its immaterial substantiality to the Agent Intellect, like it a universal substance, one for all mankind.²⁷ It is a "fourth kind of being" (the four kinds of being identified as the matter and form of sensible and intelligible entities, respectively).²⁸

Averroes finds an analogy to the material intellect in the separate intelligences of the spheres, which are said to have a similar principle of potential intelligibility, that which enables them to receive, i.e., know the intelligible forms of the spheres "above" them.²⁹ Actually, Averroes says this potential, material intellect of the spheres "thinks" something (*intelligit aliud*) besides itself, i.e., functions as though it were the Agent Intellect. He presumably can claim this because the potentiality of this universal material intellect is purely theoretical and indiscernible from its actuality; the intelligences of the spheres (among which the Agent and now material intellect are included) being simple in their operation, eternally actual.

The analogy with the operation of the celestial intelligences does not, therefore, particularly strengthen Averroes' thesis of the material intellect as an immaterial being substantially separate from the Agent Intellect, a thesis which Averroes nevertheless advances in discussing the unique situation of intellection in human beings.³⁰

Here we do have an intellect with discernibly different functions, moving along a continuum from pure potentiality to complete actualization, while retaining the unaffected integrity of each extreme. For Averroes, this can only be due to the fact that "the agent and the recipient," the Agent Intellect and material intellect, are each eternal substances, and that there are "two powers of intellect," *duas virtutes intellectus*.³¹

Both of these "powers," as mentioned, are located in the heavens now, the material intellect being called "the last of the separate intellects in the (celestial) hierarchy" (*ultimus intellectus abstractorum*

²⁷ *Long Commentary*, 406.576; 439.73; cf. *On Intellect*, p. 291.

²⁸ *Long Commentary*, 409.657.

²⁹ *Long Commentary*, 409.661.

³⁰ *Long Commentary*, 439.58–440.88.

³¹ *Long Commentary*, 440.85.

in ordine); situated presumably right “under” or “after” the Agent Intellect.³²

This new location of the material intellect is the most unique feature of Averroes’ approach to intellection in the *Long Commentary*, that which allows him to part company with the views of Alexander and Themistius. It is also the doctrine which appears to distinguish Averroes from Averroes, the Averroes of the *Long Commentary* from the Averroes of the *Middle Commentary*.

In the *Middle Commentary*, as we have seen, Averroes treated the material intellect as an extension of the Agent Intellect, locating it in the human soul and not in the heavens. Further, he took a position mediating between the views of Alexander and Themistius, rejecting their extreme formulations of the material intellect, but accepting much of their perspectives. Thus, with Alexander, Averroes saw the material intellect best described as a disposition or potentiality in the human soul to receive intelligible forms; even as with Themistius, Averroes understood the need to posit a separate immaterial substance as the substrate of this potentiality. In hitting upon the Agent Intellect as this separate substance, Averroes guaranteed the incorruptibility of the material intellect; while retaining the characterization of the material intellect as a disposition within the human soul integrated the rational faculty with the entire process of cognition along Aristotelian lines.

It is worth noting that in the *Middle Commentary* Averroes locates the disposition to receive intelligible forms not in the imaginative faculty, as he did in the *Epitome*, following Ibn Bājjah, but in man’s soul in general, or rather, simply “in man,” as Alexander had said.³³ Unlike Alexander, however, Averroes does not consider this disposition a substance of its own, neither in the human body or soul, just as he does not regard it, as he does in the *Long Commentary*, as a separate substance in the heavens, either.

The “place” of the material intellect “in man” thus remains undefined in the *Middle Commentary*. Averroes must conceive it as sandwiched in between the imaginative and appetitive faculties, responding as it does to both.³⁴ The material intellect functions here as though it belongs to the human soul, which it does of

³² *Long Commentary*, 442.63.

³³ *Middle Commentary*, 124.4, 125.8.

³⁴ *Middle Commentary*, 134.6, 140.14, and cf. *De anima* 431a14.

course (at least as long as a person lives, after which it is reabsorbed into the Agent Intellect). The material intellect is our link to eternal being and universal knowledge, though we do not, and cannot, own it. Though an emanation and extension of the Agent Intellect, it is completely different from it in its immediate sphere of operation, the world of particular forms and potentially intelligent being. However, the very being and operation of the material intellect is predicated on the assumption of an underlying congruity between it and the Agent Intellect; the material intellect constituting the first stage of a process which reaches perfection in the Agent Intellect.

Now, the *Long Commentary* conception of the material intellect does little to change the dynamics of its relation to the Agent Intellect, on the one hand, and to the imaginative faculty, on the other.³⁵ Having hung the material intellect in the heavens as a "fourth kind of being" to preserve its substantial autonomy, Averroes is obliged to find ways to express its presence in us. For indeed we do "have" the potentiality to think, and our intellects, once developed, do think universal thoughts; that is, in medieval terms which Averroes accepted, conjoin with the Agent Intellect. The material intellect must therefore make its presence felt, even if it is no longer present in us.³⁶

Averroes attempts to do this in part by the use of what may be seen as material intellect surrogates. He develops in the *Long Commentary*, to a far greater extent than in the *Middle Commentary* or *Epitome*, the role of cogitation (*fikr*) in the cognitive process. As this particular activity of the soul is discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume, I wish here just to emphasize certain features of its operation.³⁷

³⁵ Davidson (*On Intellect*, p. 317) detects a "new twist" in the *Long Commentary* discussion of the relation of the Agent Intellect to the material intellect, the latter treated now more as the medium through which the Agent Intellect acts than as the recipient of its activity. This may situate the material intellect at a greater remove from the imaginative forms, but it ultimately receives their intentions any way, and acts more than as a medium. Cf. *On Intellect*, p. 333.

³⁶ Though Davidson is sympathetic to Averroes' *Long Commentary* construal of the material intellect, he recognizes that Averroes leaves several critical elements in it untreated. Cf. *On Intellect*, p. 293.

³⁷ Cf. Richard Taylor's contribution here, "Remarks on *Cogitatio* in Averroes' *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima Libros*," pp. 217–255. Professor Taylor kindly showed me a preprint of this article, for which I am most grateful.

Linked to the imaginative intentions of sensation as presented by the imagination or memory, the power or faculty of cogitation is regarded as corporeal and is located in the brain, and hence is perishable. At the same time, it is understood as able to perceive the intelligible intention within the individual imaginative form, initiating thereby the process of abstraction and universalization which the Agent Intellect and material intellect combine to complete.³⁸

The cogitative faculty is thus disposed, as it were, to receive imaginative forms, its very being and activity is connected with them. The connection of the two is evident also in Averroes' development, in the *Long Commentary*, of the role of the "passible intellect," which may be seen as another surrogate term for the material intellect, though Averroes wishes to distinguish between them.³⁹

As is the case with the cogitative faculty, the passible intellect joins the imaginative faculty with a rational power of the soul, an "intellect" which is first — and last — regarded as a corporeal faculty.

Ultimately, Averroes equates the cogitative faculty with the passible intellect, both serving the same purpose and performing the same function, that of bridging the particular and universal domains of images and intelligible forms, permitting both particular and universal cognitions.⁴⁰

In acting as the material intellect, the cogitative faculty and/or passible intellect do not, however, really supplant the material intellect in the *Long Commentary*; the material intellect does not remain in the heavens, even though Averroes has placed it there. Presumably by a process of emanation akin to that by which the Agent Intellect acts in every person, the material intellect becomes involved in an individual's cognition in the manner previously described. Even if the material intellect has to wait upon the cogitative faculty or passible intellect to receive the intelligible intentions of imaginative forms free of their corporeal origins, it receives them in the human being, and not in the heavens.

The material intellect, it emerges in the *Long Commentary*, is represented not only by surrogate powers in the soul, but it makes

³⁸ *Long Commentary*, 415.67, 419.35.

³⁹ *Long Commentary*, 476.70.

⁴⁰ *Long Commentary*, 476.76.

its own appearance there as well, however unofficially, or rather inconsistently.

Actually, Averroes is very consistent in the *Long Commentary* in discussing the actual operation in a person of the material intellect and, through it, of the Agent Intellect. Many passages describe the process in terms similar to those encountered in the *Epitome* and *Middle Commentary*. Thus, Averroes refers in one place to two "subjects" of actual intelligibles, one being the imaginative forms, the other the material intellect; the former being outside the soul, the latter "inside" it.⁴¹ Elsewhere, the intellect "existing in us" is said to have the two activities represented by the material intellect and Agent Intellect.⁴² They act upon our imaginative faculty, the material intellect related to its forms in fact though not *per se et primo*.⁴³

The Agent Intellect is similarly if not "essentially" present in the human soul, its presence most notably acknowledged at the initial and last stages of intellection, in the acts of abstraction and conjunction.⁴⁴ The activity of the Agent Intellect is completely bound up with that of the material intellect, so much so that Averroes admits "they appear to be two in one way, and one in another;" their unity a function of the activity of the Agent Intellect upon the material intellect, and their subsequent conjunction.⁴⁵

In these ways, Averroes in effect reiterates in the *Long Commentary* his *Middle Commentary* position as regards the roles and relations of the material intellect and Agent Intellect. If he has, in the *Long Commentary*, officially removed the material intellect from being "in us", unofficially but explicitly he has returned it to its rightful place in the soul. Where exactly "in" the soul is not clear, but neither was it in the *Middle Commentary*. In both commentaries the material intellect is situated so that somehow it is able to respond to the intelligible intentions of imaginative forms, its response triggered by the activity of the Agent Intellect upon it and upon the forms.

⁴¹ *Long Commentary*, 400.393.

⁴² *Long Commentary*, 495.463.

⁴³ *Long Commentary*, 486.200, and compare the *Middle Commentary* formulation of the Agent Intellect as being in an incidental relation to man, via the material intellect, above, p. 204.

⁴⁴ *Long Commentary*, 499.559–500.615.

⁴⁵ *Long Commentary*, 451.215.

Averroes may have felt more comfortable with the formal excision of the material intellect from the body in the *Long Commentary*, leaving it to the cogitative faculty and passible intellect to relate directly to the imaginative forms in its place; they suffering the same mortal fate as the imaginative faculty thereby. However, it could hardly have escaped his notice that this very corporeality and corruptibility of the cogitative faculty and passible intellect render them unreliable as objective, unaffected transmitters of intelligible forms, however preliminary and restricted their role in abstracting universal intelligibles was conceived. The material intellect is not any more protected from material particularity by relating to the cogitative faculty or to the passible intellect than it is in relating to the imaginative forms themselves. If the intelligible intentions of the latter do not safeguard the material intellect from particularization, wherever it is (incidentally) situated, neither would additional intermediary faculties do so.

The passible intellect and/or cogitative faculty face the same dilemma Averroes first encountered with the material intellect, that of bridging corporeal and incorporeal reality. Averroes has created a second bridge to do so, with these quasi-immaterial powers, but it is no more sturdy than the first bridge, now relocated in the heavens.

It may be for this reason that Averroes continues to speak in the *Long Commentary* of the relation of the material intellect to the intentions of the imaginative forms; and it may well be for this reason, i.e., Averroes' awareness of the questionable (at best) success of his *Long Commentary* position on the material intellect, that he introduces his own theory with marked diffidence.⁴⁶ He feels he has come up with a solution to the problem, but appeals for fraternal assistance if what appears to him to be a finished theory is not so judged by others.

It may of course be the case that Averroes was more confident and more proud of his *Long Commentary* theory of the material intellect than here described, and that he regarded it as significantly different from that espoused in the *Middle Commentary*.⁴⁷ As

⁴⁶ *Long Commentary*, 399.362–368.

⁴⁷ Davidson is convinced of the significant difference existing between these two commentaries on this point. See "The Relation" article mentioned above, note 5, p. 150.

argued in this paper, however, Averroes had little philosophical reason for such confidence, though he might well have felt differently about this. As much in the two commentaries on this theme is similar, and as neither commentary denies the particular material intellect position of the other, there is no necessary reason to believe Averroes felt them incompatible. Moreover, if I am right in assuming Averroes refers in the *Middle Commentary*, as he does in the *Epitome*, to his *Long Commentary* discussion of the intellect,⁴⁸ it would appear he felt no reason to disown the view he espoused in the longer work.

It may well be that in the *Middle Commentary* Averroes presents an essential but partial picture of the issue, shorn of the complicating and philosophically problematic refinements of the *Long Commentary*. As that work acknowledges, the material intellect functions within us, and is therefore in us in some sense, wherever else it may be. It operates very similarly to the way described in the *Middle Commentary*, and Averroes in that work may simply have chosen not to mention its full metaphysical dimension. In the *Middle Commentary*, after all, the material intellect is "in us" equivocally also. Averroes' abbreviated discussion of the material intellect, and of the entire process of cognition, in the *Middle Commentary*, therefore, need not be seen as a rejection of or as constituting a necessarily different interpretation than that offered in the *Long Commentary*. The *Long Commentary* remains Averroes' most comprehensive treatment of the intellect, the *Middle Commentary* its faithful but ever discreet companion.

⁴⁸ Cf. my article on these two commentaries, mentioned above, note 5.