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Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

S.R. Ogden, *Averroes on Intellect. From Aristotelian Origins to Aquinas' Critique*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2022, 304 pp.

This monograph focuses mainly on Averroes' Long Commentary on the *De Anima* (LCDA) – lost in Arabic except for fragments and known to us in the Arabic-Latin version of Michael Scotus. It is devoted to what one might call the pivotal arguments Averroes advances for his thesis of the unicity of the intellect of the whole of mankind, in the broader context of the Aristotelian metaphysics and epistemology. In the volume under review Stephen Ogden has provided a valuable account of some central issues in the study of this major Medieval Aristotelian commentator, and in particular has made Averroes' unique contribution to the reception of the Aristotelian noetics more easily understandable.

Ogden starts his book with an Introduction (p. 1-13) setting out the aims and describing the contents of his study. He considers Averroes' unicity thesis "the most debated and enduring of his philosophical legacies" arguing that its "impact and longevity stem largely from Averroes' compelling interpretations of Aristotle and, more importantly, his own powerful independent philosophical arguments" (p. 1). It is one of Ogden's declared aims "to develop a new and comprehensive analysis of Averroes' unicity thesis on intellect and the central arguments for it, from their foundations in Aristotle's *De Anima* to Aquinas's most famous and potent objections" (p. 9).

Chapter 1, "The All-Or-Nothing Reading: Averroes (and Aquinas) on Aristotle's *DA* III.4–5" is divided into nine parts (pp. 14-74). Ogden depicts Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle's *De Anima* III 4–5 as a novel and quite credible reading of Aristotle. The core of the chapter is an analysis of Averroes's conception of the potential intellect as described in his Long Commentary to Aristotle's *De Anima* III 4-5, which Ogden calls "the all-or-nothing reading". He argues that "However much Averroes and Aquinas disagree on the separate substantiality of the intellects, the key to both their interpretations is an all-or-nothing reading of the shared immateriality and ontological status of both the material/possible intellect (hereafter, MPI) and the agent/active intellect (hereafter, AI). Averroes argues that the MPI, described in *DA* III.4 as *δυνατός* (بالقوة /*possibilis*), is separable, impassible, and unmixed—exactly like the AI (*νοῦς ποιητικός* /العقل الفعال /*intellectus agens*) in *DA* III.5. The fact that Aristotle uses this same language for each intellect implies that each should have the same ontological status. Either both are separate, eternal substances (as Averroes argues) or they are both inherent human faculties (Aquinas)—this is why I call the reading all-or-nothing" (p. 14). Considering this aim, Ogden takes a deeper look into contemporary interpretations of the *De Anima*; he singles "three basic (often mutually supporting) ways of reading *DA* in opposition to Averroes (and Aquinas), (...) modernism, materialism, and minimalism", and his point is that "many (if not most) deny at least one major component" of Averroes' interpretation of this Aristotelian treatise (p. 15). Ogden's own interpretation is grounded in three assumptions. First, "Averroes's core reading relies on the fact that key descriptions of the AI in *DA* III.5—as separable (*chōristos*), impassible (*apathēs*), and unmixed (*amigēs*)—are already endowed to the MPI (what Averroes calls the "material intellect") in III.4" (p. 20). This exegetical strategy is the way in which "Averroes advances an all-or-nothing reading of the immateriality (and separate substantiality) of both the MPI and the AI, against the materialist interpretation" (p. 22). The latter is the interpretation of the *De Anima* shared by Alexander of Aphrodisias, Galen, and Ibn Bāǧǧa - an interpretation that Averroes explicitly rejects. Second, Ogden argues that Averroes is the first commentator to consider the

perishable human intellect, which is called passible intellect by Aristotle in *De Anima* III 5, as a different faculty from the potential intellect which Aristotle describes in *De Anima* III 4 as the potentiality to receive the intelligible forms. According to Ogden “many interpreters read the impassible intellect in these lines [*scil.* III.5] as the AI and the ‘passible intellect’ as the MPI (e.g., Alexander, partially Themistius, and many contemporary minimalists) (p. 25)”, and this is the reason why he says that Averroes is the only one who “insists that the passible intellect must be some third faculty in order to avoid contradiction” (p. 26). Finally, Ogden claims that Averroes identifies the passible intellect with the imaginative/cogitative power.

In the remaining part of the chapter Ogden makes two further statements. He explains that “Aquinas insists on a very different interpretation of the exact nature of the separability of the MPI and AI, but he definitely follows Averroes’ same strategy in the all-or-nothing reading (...) Furthermore, because Aquinas shares the all-or-nothing reading of the immateriality of the MPI and the AI, he also adopts Averroes’ interpretation of the passible intellect” (pp. 28-9). Ogden provides two elements in support of his interpretation: the fact that Aquinas explicitly cites Averroes by name in his own commentary on the *De Anima* thus criticizing his interpretation of the potential intellect and of the Agent Intellect, and the fact that “Aquinas does not have much, if any, access to others in the tradition who did make similar moves (e.g., Philoponus)” (p. 30). Finally, Ogden argues that this reading of *De Anima* III 4-5 is a credible interpretation of Aristotle “and that contemporary commentators need to consider it. (...) In fact, the all-or-nothing reading follows a modern methodology of carefully attending to key vocabulary usage throughout a text” (p. 32). To this end, Ogden offers his own defence of the interpretations of Averroes (and Aquinas) by assessing some of the contemporary readings of *DA* III 4-5 and focusing on the terms ἀπαθής, παθητικός and χωριστός. To make his point clear, he imagines Averroes arguing against Aquinas and both of them arguing with some contemporary scholars about ‘separability’ (pp. 32-63). He then presents Alexander of Aphrodisias’s interpretation (pp. 63-73). “Aquinas adopts this all-or-nothing logic from Averroes, and so he borrows Averroes’ objections to Alexander regarding the MPI in the *Sent.* and *SCG*, which are the two works where Alexander is singled out for criticism. Both think that Alexander’s is a materialist position regarding the MPI and that, furthermore, nothing arising from the mixture of the elements in the body (as the MPI is supposed to be) could receive immaterial universal intelligibles and thus qualify as intellect. Aquinas (following Averroes) sees that Alexander’s interpretation of the MPI as a certain disposition or preparation (*epitēdeiotēs/isti’dād/preparatio*) might avoid the straightforward objections already canvassed by Averroes, which rely on the description of the MPI in III.4 as unmixed with the body and separable from it” (p. 65).

Chapter 2, “Averroes’ Determinate Particular Argument” (pp. 75-108) is devoted to an in-depth discussion of the treatment of the potential intellect in Averroes’s Long Commentary on *De Anima* III, comment 5, and focuses on the argument which Ogden calls “the Determinate Particular Argument (DPA) because it claims that the MPI cannot be a determinate particular if it is to be an ontological receptacle of actual universal intelligibles” (p. 76). Upon an extensive discussion which clarifies his understanding of this argument in light of Averroes’ broader metaphysics, Ogden explains why he thinks that “this argument, even on Averroes’ own terms, is logically susceptible to multiple MPIs, making it difficult to see how (if at all) Averroes could use it to prove the full unicity thesis” (p. 106). Ogden concludes that “the MPI, in virtue of being numerically one separate substance and separate

form, must be a kind of determinate particular (*tode ti/mushār ilay-hi/aliquid hoc*). Though I do not think he ever explicitly uses such a term to describe the MPI, his metaphysics is committed to the implication. Therefore, the MPI is not universal (...) Rather, it is a higher order of immaterial determinate particular belonging to the ‘fourth kind of being’—i.e., the intelligible being of separate substances/forms” (p. 95), suggesting to “leave undecided the question of Averroes’ own psychological states regarding the DPA’s sufficiency” (p. 105). Ogden’s point is that this argument establishes only in part the unicity thesis: the separate and immaterial nature of the potential intellect does not entail that it is one for all mankind.

This observation is also an introduction to the discussion of Chapter 3, “Averroes’ Unity Argument” (pp. 109-144). The assumption is that “regardless of what Averroes himself may have thought, the DPA is philosophically insufficient for demonstrating the more radical component of his view—namely that there is only one MPI for all humanity” (p. 111). Ogden focuses on the treatment of the potential intellect in the final part of comment 5 of Averroes’s Long Commentary on *De Anima* III. This argument, labelled the Unity Argument (UA), is “more elegant—directly attacking the contrary thesis of multiple human intellects” (p. 109). It is well known that for Averroes this position cannot explain shared, unified knowledge. Thus, in Ogden’s view it is “Averroes’ most significant independent philosophical demonstration for his single separate MPI (p. 109). According to Ogden, “Themistius had a major impact on Averroes, yet his doctrine is decidedly difficult to penetrate” (p. 122). As a result, “whether Averroes regards Themistius as hazy on the singularity of the MPI or only as incorrect on the generation of intelligibles, either way, Themistius does not offer a sufficient solution to the various one-many problems in Averroes’ mind. Averroes’ presentation of Themistius is historical proof that someone might fully agree with the DPA, but yet remain subject to the one-many doubts and objections concerning the seeming generation and number of the MPI. Averroes sees himself as correcting the errors of even such an excellent a commentator as Themistius” (p. 123). Something similar is argued with respect to Avicenna. “Avicenna’s separate AI also does not stand in the appropriate abstracting relationship to images, at least on the traditional emanationist interpretation of Avicenna which Averroes mentions (...). Averroes could also support his Aristotelianism from introspective evidence, i.e., the way in which images appear to be necessary for understanding (p. 128). Ogden’s main thesis is that in his Long Commentary “Averroes consciously develops a position neither he nor anyone else in the commentary tradition had ever previously articulated (...)”. He boldly claims that “While his reading of prior commentators may roughly explain his position in the MCDA [the Middle Commentary on the *De Anima*] and it always remained a serious, studied concern for him, it cannot account for the leap in doctrine from the MCDA to the LCDA. Only new arguments and a new appraisal of what intellect demands could have persuaded Averroes. He does not merely pick and choose ingredients from his predecessors’ views, as if he were mixing a bizarre Aristotelian cocktail” (p. 8). He also strives for a reappraisal of the Aristotelian sources of this theory arguing that Averroes “(1) offers strong textual arguments directly from Aristotle’s *DA* itself, and, more importantly, (2) he mounts powerful independent philosophical arguments” (p. 8). However, that Averroes’s interpretation of *De Anima* III 4-5 depends upon Themistius seems to be uncontroversial. The comparison below is the clearest example of Themistius’ influence on Averroes:

Them., *In De An.* III 5,
p. 105.29-34 Heinze

καὶ ὁ μὲν κοινὸς [καὶ] φθαρτὸς
καὶ παθητικὸς καὶ ἀχώριστος
καὶ τῷ σώματι μεμιγμένος, ὁ
δυνάμει δὲ ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἄμικτος
τῷ σώματι καὶ χωριστὸς (ταῦτα
γὰρ περὶ αὐτοῦ διαρρήδην φησίν),
οἷον πρόδρομος τοῦ ποιητικοῦ, ὥσπερ
ἡ αὐγὴ τοῦ φωτός, ἢ ὥσπερ ἄνθος
πρόδρομον τοῦ καρποῦ· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπὶ
τῶν ἄλλων ἡ φύσις ἀφροιμίαστον τὸ
τέλος εὐθὺς παραδίδωσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ
καταδέστερα μὲν συγγενῆ δὲ τῶν
τελειότερων προτρέχει. χωριστὸς μὲν
οὖν καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ ἀμιγῆς καὶ ἀπαθὴς
(ῥητῶς γὰρ περὶ αὐτοῦ ταῦτά
φησιν), οὐ μὴν ὁμοίως χωριστὸς
τῷ ποιητικῷ.

While the common [intellect] is perishable, passive, and inseparable from and mixed with the body, the potential [intellect] is unaffected, unmixed with the body, and separate (for he says this of it explicitly). It is like a forerunner of the productive intellect, as the [sun's] ray is of the daylight, or as the flower is a forerunner of the fruit. For in other cases too nature does not immediately provide the end without a prelude; instead, things that are deficient, but of the same kind as more perfect things, are the latter's forerunners. The potential intellect, then, is itself separate, unmixed, and unaffected (for he says this of it in his own words), yet it is not separate in the same way as the productive [intellect]. (trans. R.B. Todd).

Themistius's explains that:

Averr., *Comm. mag. (De Anima III 4, 429 a 21-24)*,
C.5, pp. 387.7-11; 388.54-389.70 Crawford¹

Cum declaravit quod intellectus materialis non habet aliquam formam materialium, incepit diffinire ipsum hoc modo, et dixit quoniam non habet naturam secundum hoc nisi naturam possibilitatis ad recipiendum formas intellectas materiales. (...) Hoc igitur movit Aristotelem ad imponendum hanc naturam que est alia a natura materie et a natura forme et a natura congregati. Et hoc idem induxit Theophrastum et **Themistium et plures expositores ad opinandum quod intellectus materialis est substantia neque generabilis neque corruptibilis.** Omne enim generabile et corruptibile est hoc; sed iam demonstratum est quod iste non est hoc, neque corpus neque forma in corpore. **Et induxit eos ad opinandum, cum hoc, quod ista est sententia Aristotelis. Ista enim intentio, scilicet quod iste intellectus est talis, bene apparet intuentibus demonstrationem Aristotelis et sua verba;** de demonstratione autem secundum quod exposuimus; de verbis vero **quia dixit ipsum esse non passivum, et dixit ipsum esse separabile et simplex.** Hec enim tria verba usitantur in eo ab Aristotele, et non est rectum, immo est remotum, uti aliquo eorum in doctrina demonstrative de generabili et corruptibili

After he had explained that the material intellect does not have some form characteristic of material things, he began to define it in the following way. He said it has no nature according to this except the nature of the possibility for receiving intelligible material forms. (...) This, therefore, moved Aristotle to set forth this nature, which is other than the nature of matter, other than the nature of form, and other than the nature of the composite. This same consideration brought Theophrastus, **Themistius, and several commentators to hold the opinion that the material intellect is a substance which is neither generable nor corruptible.** For everything which is generable and corruptible is a determinate particular; but it has already been demonstrated that <the material intellect> is not a determinate particular nor a body nor a form in a body. **This brought them to hold the opinion, as well, that this is the opinion of Aristotle. For that intention, namely, that this intellect is such, is quite apparent to those who regard the demonstration of Aristotle and his words,** with reference to the demonstration as we have explained (it) and with reference to (his) words **because he said that it is unaffected, and he said that it is separable and simple.** For these three words are used with regard to it by Aristotle and it is not right-rather it is highly unlikely-for him to use any of these (words) in a demonstrative doctrine about something generable and corruptible. (trans. R.C. Taylor, Th.-A. Druart, pp. 304-306).

¹ *Averroes (Ibn Rushd) of Cordoba, Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, Trans. with introduction and notes by R.C. Taylor with the collaboration of Th.-A. Druart, Yale U.P., New Haven 2009.

1. The Aristotelian “passive” intellect (i.e., subject to affections: νοῦς παθητικός, III 5, 430 a 14-18) is the same item that elsewhere is called by Aristotle the “compound” (*koinon*, cf. *De Anima* I 4) and which is the faculty of carrying out reasoning and feeling passions: the thing which thinks, loves and hates, called the *koinon* in Book I 4, is claimed to be mortal in Book III 5. The passive intellect is the *koinon* and is not the “potential intellect” or intellectual faculty.
2. The Aristotelian “potential intellect” (ὁ δυνάμει) is our intellectual faculty, the immortal part of our soul, an imperishable separable substance: it is impassible and not commingled with the body (ἀπαθής καὶ ἄμικτος τῷ σώματι), therefore it is separate (χωριστός), which means it has autonomy in being. The potential intellect or intellectual faculty is kindred in nature, but not identical with the Agent Intellect.
3. Separateness, purity and impassibility can be referred to the intellectual faculty and to that separate substance which is always an Intellect in act because the two intellects are kindred by nature: both are incorporeal substances and can enter into a relationship.

The consistency of Themistius’ position is ensured by his adoption of this criterion, which he considers genuinely Aristotelian, but to which he adds the Neoplatonic trait of spirituality resorting in the end to an outright manipulation of Aristotle’s words. The intellect, a spiritual substance, impassible and not commingled with the body, is not to be confused with that faculty of carrying out reasoning and feeling passions. Like Themistius, but unlike Aristotle, Averroes attributes impassibility, separateness and noncommingling with the body to the potential intellect.

This is not to say that Themistius is Averroes’ only source. What is certain, however, especially in light of the thirtyfive explicit quotations from Themistius’ paraphrase in the Long Commentary, is that the similarity of the solutions of Aristotle’s conundrum in Themistius and Averroes is best accounted for in terms of the influence of the former on the latter.

Notwithstanding this difference of opinion between this reviewer and the author, she wants to emphasize that anyone interested in Averroes and in the transmission and transformation of the Aristotelian noetics in the Middle Ages should read Ogden’s book.

Elisa Coda