

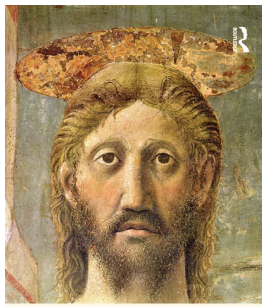
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AVERROES (IBN RUSHD)

Gerhard Endress

Abū-l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn-Muḥammad ibn-Rushd, known in the Latin West under the Hispanicized name ‘Averroes’, was, like his ancestors, a jurist in Islamic Andalusia. He became Chief Judge of Cordoba and Seville, court physician to the Almohad princes of Morocco and Spain, counsellor and courtier in the orbit of power. He belonged to the three worlds of intellectual culture in his age: he was brought up in the world of the *‘ulamā*, learned exegetes and administrators of the *Sharī‘a* (the revealed law of Islam); he mastered the world of the rational sciences – applied in medicine and astronomy, and crowned by the universal wisdom of philosophy that was taken to lead the way to true wisdom and ultimate happiness; and he rose to high station in the world of court, where the Commander of the Faithful ruled as absolute king. He embodied the sum of intellectual excellence and active experience a person could gain in his time and place.

The religious community, and the political conditions, of Muslim Spain underwent deep changes in Averroes’ lifetime. His project – to give a rational foundation to the Muslim doctrine and in the long run to vindicate the work of philosophy as a rule of reason governing all of society – with its progress and its setbacks, was closely connected with the social condition, the spiritual outlook and the dialectic of power and authority in the Andalust.

When Averroes was born in Cordoba in 1126, the Maghrib and Andalusia were governed by the Berber dynasty of the Almoravids (al-Murābiṭūn, ‘warriors of the faith’), who had entered North Africa from south of the Atlas. These were followed by the Almohads (al-Muwaḥḥidūn: proclaiming God’s unity, *tawḥīd*), a fundamentalist reform movement led by the Berber Ibn Tūmart, the Mahdī (‘The Rightly Guided’). After years of study in the East, he returned to North Africa and, proclaiming a spiritual reform of Muslim society, conquered Morocco. The entry of the Almohads into Andalusia (from 1145) was followed by two decades of unrest and revolt. Only years after the access to power of the amīr Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf (1163, taking the caliphal title of Commander of the Faithful, *amīr al-mu‘minīn*, in 1168), the country was pacified. The submission, in 1169 and 1171,

of the insurgents contending with the Almohads for power in central Andalusia and threatening Cordoba and Seville initiated the heyday of Almohad power in Andalusia.

In the course of the 1160s, Averroes conceived his project, the long-term project of his life, defined ever more clearly in the course of a prolonged struggle with the epistemic paradigm of the religious community, and brought to fruition in his years of maturity: establishing demonstrative science, the law of reason, as the basis of thought and action in the whole of human society, thus uniting the religious, scientific and intellectual communities under the authority of the philosopher-jurist. This project seems to have consciously developed when he was qadi of Seville, in the years from 1169 until at least 1171, the year of the earthquake at Cordoba. Waiting for peace to return to Andalusia, Averroes wrote his epoch-making manual of the principles of legal reasoning, and his three works on rational theology, the defence of reason versus the religious community and the refutation of al-Ghazali's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, the famous theologian's attack on the validity of demonstrative philosophy.

The legal and theological doctrine of the founder of the Almohad movement, Ibn Tūmart, the Mahdī, could be read as a support of rational theology and independent legal reasoning. In law, he condemned the rigid, traditionalist casuistry exercised by the dominant Mālikī schools of law, and demanded a return to the sources of the revealed law, the Shari'a, and to the principles of sound reasoning; in theology, he insisted on the rational necessity of the creator and his unicity. Indeed, Averroes closely followed his creed in his own exposition of the articles of faith, while showing that philosophy, not the theology of traditionalist Ash'arism, was the true defence of the purity of *tawhīd*.

The consent of society to this attitude is signalled by an anecdote about the encouragement given to Averroes by the Almohad Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf, who in 1163 had succeeded the caliph 'Abd-al-Mu'min: the prince himself prompted the Muslim jurist and Aristotelian scientist to interpret this philosophy from its authentic sources. After a decisive breakthrough, Averroes perceived Aristotle as the exemplary man – an example given to humanity by divine Providence – who, in his encyclopedia had encompassed all science, and who by his method of demonstration had proved the coherence of rational knowledge with the reality of the intelligible cosmos (*see* Vol. 1, Ch. 5, "Aristotle"). After the re-pacification of the Andalus, Averroes returned to Cordoba, where he became great qadi, and also court physician to the Almohad prince.

In 1194, an indictment of unbelief was brought against him, born from the enmity of traditionalist jurists and the adherents of Sufi mysticism. In 1197 he was exiled; in 1198 he returned to favour. A few months later, on the night of 11 December, he died.

ARISTOTLE AND ARISTOTELIANISM

The project of Averroes evolved in the course of a dialogue with the philosophical and religious authorities of the Hellenistic and the Muslim Arabic traditions. The increasing and, in the final analysis, paramount importance that is accorded to Aristotle is a primacy given to the absolute authority of reason. The project of instituting demonstrative philosophy as a general basis of the epistemic community – embracing the religious institutions as well as the scientific community of mathematicians, astronomers and physicians – was to be realized through a commentary of the Aristotelian encyclopedia of the sciences.

Since the first reception of his works in Arabic translation, Aristotle was regarded by his Arabic followers (the *falāsifa*) as the guarantor of the way towards demonstrable truth, for the rational sciences as well as for the religious disciplines: the First Teacher, so called by Avicenna (Ibn Sina, *d.* 1037). Avicenna set out to rewrite the Peripatetic canon of readings according to the order and under the titles of the Aristotelian works: *Logica*, *Physica* and *Metaphysica*, supplemented by the mathematical quadrivium, and by the *Canon* of theoretical and practical medicine. His *Summa* of philosophy was based on a new metaphysics, which was to supersede Aristotle's. It is Aristotelian in that the universals are bound up with real substances, but can be abstracted by intellectual analysis, relying on self-evident principles and on demonstrative reasoning. It is (neo-)Platonic in that the divine mind is placed at the origin of an emanative series of intellects descending from the first cause, origin of the first intellect, over the celestial spheres down to the agent intellect. As a cosmic entity, the agent intellect (or 'active' intellect, in Aristotle's *On the Soul* III.5, an entity that makes actual what is potentially known in the soul's material) bestows the forms of the terrestrial world: the sublunary world of form-in-matter. The emanation of the forms from the 'Giver of Forms', the agent intellect, into the genera and species of the material substances, corresponds to the movement of cognition: the return of the soul to its origin, to the vision of the intelligible cosmos. In the process of cognitive reversion, the agent intellect, making actual what is potential in the mind, confers the divine illumination required for every true and necessary act of knowledge. Departing from the concepts of substance and accident, essence and existence, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, Avicenna specified the concept and proof of the divine cause under the terms of *kalām* theology (Wisnovsky 2003). He established the first cause as the necessary existent that alone has being essentially, is necessary by itself and is not a composite of essence and existence; all contingent, temporal being needs a first cause, which is necessary and eternal and confers being on the creation but, together with its eternal cause, the whole of the world coexists eternally.

This hierarchy of creation, modelled on Avicenna's cosmology, is still reflected in Averroes's early *Epitome* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. For the religious community, however, this Aristotelian Neoplatonic model – which implied the eternity of the world – remained a stumbling block even for those theologians who

adopted Aristotelian logic as a basis of rational discourse. The refutation written by the jurist and theologian al-Ghazali (*d.* 1111), who was well versed in philosophy and a formative influence on the young Averroes through his summaries of Avicennian *falsafa* (i.e. *philosophia* in its Arabic adaptation), provoked the Andalusian's response. Al-Ghazali contested the philosophers' claim that human reason was consistent with God's wisdom, but nevertheless placed Aristotelian logic and hermeneutic into the service of the religious disciplines. Through al-Ghazali's adoption of Aristotelian concepts, systematized by the schools of *Sunnī kalām* developing in his wake, Avicenna's new interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics shaped the scholasticism of later Islamic theology. In consequence, the defence of philosophy – of a philosophy to be further developed, refined and made immune – was undertaken by members of the same community who regarded rational demonstration as indispensable as a firm basis of sound argument in the service of Islam, and prepared the way for an Islamic scholasticism, adopted as a propaedeutic and methodology by the teachers of theology and law.

AVERROES AND HIS PREDECESSORS IN THE MUSLIM WEST

Meanwhile, the Aristotelians of the Muslim West – Andalusia and North Africa – took up the challenge of al-Ghazali. Averroes' first predecessor in the field of philosophy, Ibn Bājjā (*d.* 1139), who introduced al-Farabi into Andalus, had despaired of applying the remedy of philosophy to the Almoravid state of his day; the hope that the few 'weeds' (an expression coined by al-Farabi for the seeds of corruption, now used in a reverse sense) of philosophy would spread out in the field dominated by narrow-minded jurists (*fuqahā'*) remained vague. If the emigration (*hijra*) from the corrupt state, which al-Farabi had recommended (and practised), proved impossible, the philosopher must lead the life of the solitary, of those "whom the Ṣūfis call the strangers", strangers in this world "who travel in their minds to other abodes, which are their true homes" (Ibn Bājjā 1968: 42ff.).

Ibn Ṭufayl (*d.* 1185) was the author of the famous philosophical romance of the Philosophus Autodidactus, *The Living Son of the Wakeful*: that is, the human intellect, brought to perfection by the divine active intellect. In the preface, he makes an attempt to mediate between Avicenna's and al-Ghazali's concepts of intellectual and religious knowledge: While the 'intuition' (*ḥads*) of Avicenna is the ultimate perfection of demonstrative reasoning, providing the accomplished philosopher with the result of a perfect syllogism in one immediate operation, the *ḥads* of mystical theology – like al-Ghazali's, grafted on Avicenna's *falsafa* by Ibn Ṭufayl – is the irrational inspiration accorded by divine grace. It was Ibn Ṭufayl, personal physician to the Almohad prince Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf, who presented Averroes at the court to be his successor, and it was Abū Ya'qūb who encouraged the Muslim jurist and Aristotelian scientist to interpret the philosophy of the ancients from its authentic sources.

ALMOHADISM AND RATIONAL THEOLOGY

In keeping a cautious distance from such philosophical studies as would involve the controversial principles of physical and metaphysical doctrine, in his earlier works Averroes conforms to the material, social and intellectual restrictions imposed by the community in a time of crisis. The final victory of the Almohad dynasty opened chances for rational philosophy to join rational theology in the defence of the *Sharī'a* and of the purity of the monotheistic creed. While militant and intolerant in the imposition of their ideology of *tawhīd*, the confession of the unicity of God, the Almohads brought an ideology not legalistic but intellectual. 'Almohadism', as defined by recent studies on the background of Averroes (Urvoy 1991; Geoffroy 1999), is originally the spiritual outlook of the founder of the movement, Ibn Tūmart. In the articles of faith of his *Creed*, laid down on his return from Baghdad to the Maghreb, he evinced the firm conviction that each of the basic articles of faith is a truth demanded by reason: the existence of God the creator, the unicity of God, the necessary attributes of God and the transcendence of the divine – his essence, symbolized by the divine names in the revelation, must be accepted “without anthropomorphism, and without [asking the question] ‘how’” (attrib. Averroes, Almohad Creed, my translation). The religious and moral content of the *Sharī'a* follow from the knowledge of God, known through his creation (Urvoy 1978). These very principles were applied in Averroes' early works on jurisprudence and on the positive theology of Islam (Geoffroy 2005).

The Distinguished Jurist's Primer is a handbook of the methodological principles of legal reasoning (*ijtihād*), based on analogy; in its very first sentences, it opposes those schools of Muslim law that decline independent reasoning, and insists on the jurist's authority to choose from the decisions of the schools of law, and to make independent deductions.

In his exposition of the positive Islamic theology of Almohadism, *Clarifying the Methods of Proof Concerning the Beliefs of the (Religious) Community*, Averroes makes use of the tools of non-demonstrative discourse, poetical metaphor (*tashbīh*) and rhetorical persuasion (*iqnā*), true to the paradigm established by al-Farabi, that is, to the ancillary task of instruction of the community, not trained in demonstrative method, but of necessity controlled by the masters of demonstration. Averroes proceeded to demonstrative argument in his commentary on Plato's *Republic*, where he duly eliminated from 'scientific' discourse the myth of the tenth book as containing “dialectical argument” and “remote imitations”, “not necessary to a man's becoming virtuous” (Averroes 1974). While the religious law may provide guidance to the people, the community will be corrupted if it fails to seek guidance from the philosophers' demonstrative science (*ibid.*: 3ff., 145ff., 148ff.). Even though his purpose in the *Methods of Proofs* is different, Averroes will never compromise his philosophical creed, and will adduce not only the Scripture but also the works of Aristotle in order to prove his point. The *Mutakallimūn*, the speculative theologians (especially those of the Ash'ariyya,

al-Ghazali's school of thought), using allegory to preserve the transcendence of God in the face of the anthropomorphism of the Scripture, fall short of the criteria of certitude that only valid demonstration can meet. Thus Averroes turns to Aristotle in order to show that the notions of material body, space and time do not apply to God. Even though God is omnipotent, he is not the creator of evil, but (against the determinism of al-Ghazali) human beings have full responsibility for their actions. Even though God is self-contained, remote from knowing the particulars of his creation and exercising providence towards them, Averroes admits of a teleological argument; in his demonstrative expositions, he will say that God the Prime Mover, being most perfect, will draw the world towards perfection, being their final cause. (For Averroes' further development of this topic, see Kukkonen 2002; Taylor 2007.)

Initially inspired by the attitude of al-Ghazali, perceived as spokesman of a religion purified and enlightened by reason, Almohadism arrived at sustaining a philosophy that, contrary to the *kalām* of al-Ghazali, held up the essential coherence between the divine will and the reason bestowed on humanity: a coherence demonstrated on the evidence of the physical creation. Now, abandoning the synthesis between Avicennian *falsafa* and the Ghazalian paradigm of religious knowledge, Averroes returned to the universal claim of absolute reason, which, in the Islamic community, had been first raised by al-Farabi: assuming for demonstrative science the authority of true exegesis, and relegating theology to an ancillary role where non-demonstrative methods would serve to convey the truth to the multitude.

This he took on with his great polemic against the *kalām* of al-Ghazali. As a motivation of his effort in defence of philosophy, he would state from the outset that the discourse of the theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*) was contrary to the explicit evidence of the *Shari'a*. In order to avert error and heresy from religion, the philosopher assumes the authority of true exegesis.

In the first place, he wrote a legal pronouncement (a *fatwā*) in his *Decisive Treatise on the Nature of the Relation between the Religion [Shari'a] and Philosophy*, asserting that the *Shari'a* "has rendered obligatory the study of beings by the intellect, and reflection on them, ... and has urged us to have demonstrative knowledge of God the Exalted and all the beings of His creation" (1967: 50), and showing that demonstrative truth and scriptural truth cannot conflict. What is more: true philosophy, based on demonstrative reasoning, is the safeguard of the true religion (*ibid.*: 70). Only "Those who are well grounded in science" (Qu'ran III: 9) are able to reconcile apparent contradictions in the Scripture.

Now since this religion is true and summons to the study which leads to knowledge of the Truth, we the Muslim community know definitively that demonstrative study does not lead to [conclusions] conflicting with what Scripture [or Religious Law] has given us; for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it. (1967: 50)

Averroes discarded the *kalām* paradigm of hermeneutic knowledge in his reckoning with Ghazali, clearing the way for his ultimate purpose: the final emancipation of reason from the strictures of scriptural exegesis and traditionalist literalism. In defence of philosophic rationalism, he wrote his large-scale, systematic refutation of Ghazali, the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*), which is accompanied by a new interpretation of the true Aristotle, and is at the same time a critique of Avicenna's system. The main points of al-Ghazali's attack against Aristotelian philosophy in its Avicennian interpretation were the doctrines of the eternity of the world, and the denial of individual immortality; more generally, the 'incoherence' of philosophical demonstration, not valid for resolving the aporias set before human understanding of God's transcendence.

It is true that these treatises were restricted to 'dialectical' arguments, using non-technical language, to be used towards those who are "not men of scientific learning" in order "to establish virtuous opinions in their souls", and hence defended for this purpose in political science. The philosopher was bound to obey the structures of reasoning and its consequences, which Aristotle had arrived at uncompromisingly. Under this condition, the harmony between legal reasoning based on the revelation and the absolute truth based on demonstrative reasoning from universal premises, which the early school of philosophy founded by al-Kindī pretended to provide, did not hold. Thus the ancient cosmology, the doctrine of the eternity of the world, was transmitted to the early *falāsifa* and adapted by them, in a form simplified and made acceptable for the adherents of a monotheistic and creationist religion: of belief in a God who was both first cause and first intellect, and who had willed at the beginning of time to create the physical world from nothing. But the true philosopher was bound to the strictures of demonstrative reasoning. This is conceived as a higher dimension of rationalism where reason is not just an ancillary tool, and is unhampered by restrictions imposed by a divine will contrary to its inherent necessity. "According to the philosophers, the meaning of 'will' in God is nothing but that every act proceeds from Him through knowledge" (Averroes 1954: 257).

DEMONSTRATIVE SCIENCE

The primary purpose of Averroes was determined by a philosophic tradition that sustained the method of demonstrative logic and the encyclopedia of the rational sciences in the framework of the Peripatetic canon. This was presented as a system – including, and at the same time subordinating, the religious disciplines – by al-Farabi, refounded and rewritten by Avicenna, put into the service of religious learning by al-Ghazali and reduced to the role of an ancillary by al-Ghazali's successors. Accordingly, the initial project of Averroes was limited to "what is necessary for the first perfection of man" (*Epitome de anima*, cf. Alaoui

1982: 53ff.), starting with concise compendia of logic and the physical sciences, but from the very beginning taking Aristotle as supreme guide.

The same limitation is pronounced in the Epitome of Aristotle's *On the Soul*. The 'first perfection' (entelechy) refers to the grades of actuality, as described by Aristotle in his treatise on the soul (II.1): Soul is the perfection of the ensouled body, its entelechy – the essential form of the living being. Aristotle distinguishes the first from the second degree of perfection by the example of the degrees of knowledge; the first is the degree of acquired knowledge, the second is knowledge employed in an actual cognitive operation or contemplation. In the soul, reason is active, at first potentially, and then actually, and as the eye is in need of light making seen the visible, reason is in need of an activating principle that "makes all things" (*De anima* III.5). To clarify the process of cognition and, through this, to ascertain the possibility of the perfection of humanity through reason was to become the main objective of Averroes' project, turning with an increasing and exclusive devotion to Aristotle as an example of such perfection of the first seed implanted in the nature of humankind.

THE COMMENTATOR: THE RETURN TO ARISTOTLE

Around 1169, Averroes was presented to Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf, who engaged him in a disputation about the philosophers' doctrine of the eternity of the world, and encouraged him to undertake a detailed explanation of Aristotle's books. Abandoning the restraint of his early works, launching the new series of 'Middle Commentaries' (*talkhīṣ*, commentary-paraphrase) of no less than fifteen works of Aristotle, he follows Aristotle's text much more closely and meticulously than in the early epitomes. Returning to the text of Aristotle, and approaching the true meaning of his words, he gains an ever increasing confidence in the validity of demonstrative science: if Aristotle could be proved true, pursuing his method would assert the authority of his followers. Repeated statements in praise of Aristotle present Averroes on his way to an attitude of eager optimism; the newly won insight into the true meaning of Aristotle permits him to put his commentators, ancient (Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Johannes Philoponus) and 'modern' (al-Farabi, Avicenna, al-Ghazali) into place.

COSMOLOGY

The ambivalence of Averroes' esteem of his predecessor, and his new self-confidence, can be observed in his cosmological treatises of this 'middle' period: the "Middle Commentary on Aristotle's *On the Heaven*", and the treatise *On the Substance of the Sphere* (written in 1178–9), on the nature of the celestial body: being eternal and possessing infinite force, can the celestial body be composed of matter and form?

The basic issue is the relation of matter and form in the celestial soul: if the celestial sphere is a composite, it is susceptible to corruption and so, given an infinite amount of time, would in fact corrupt, in which case it could not be eternal, and yet for Averroes (and most Arabic-speaking philosophers after al-Kindi) the celestial sphere is eternal. Averroes argues that the moving form in the celestial body is a separate form, not a form-in-matter. If this body were composed of form and matter, it would be eternal by accident only. The intellect and the intelligible in the celestial body being one and the same, the form towards which the sphere is moved and the form by which it is moved are one and the same. The celestial body functions as matter for this incorporeal form, but exists in actuality, not requiring the form for its existence; it constitutes a matter, or rather a subject (*mawḍūʿ*), only for the purpose of receiving the celestial form, which is giving it eternal duration (Endress 1995). As long as the definition of soul as the form of a bodily substrate was upheld in the case of the celestial body – as in Averroes' Alexander – the aporia remained unsolved. Only his own proposal would take account of all the problems involved. Both John Philoponus and Avicenna had exposed philosophy to criticism and abuse: Philoponus, the Christian Alexandrian who in his refutations of Aristotle and the Neoplatonists (especially of Proclus' *On the Eternity of the World*) tried to prove the world's creation in time, erred through his faulty understanding of the motive force in the heaven. Avicenna went wrong with his conception of the first principle. He built his proof of the existence of a first principle on an analysis of the concepts of necessary and possible being: there must be a divine first cause which alone is necessary in virtue of itself; but then the celestial body, which in itself has a finite force, would be necessary and infinite only in virtue of another, immaterial principle; and it would be absurd to posit a contingent being having a possibility of being destroyed which is never actualized (Averroes 1986: 104ff.). Averroes contends that only a physical, not a metaphysical, proof based on the motion of natural substances can provide a valid demonstration of God's existence. Only the true understanding of Aristotle's doctrine – and this is the task Averroes had set for himself – could redeem true philosophy from error and blame. He never tires of invoking the testimony of his forebears. But in the final effort, he is on his own.

While still in the course of his defence of philosophy against Ghazali's *kalām*, Averroes embarks on the last and most ambitious phase of his project: the Great Commentary (*sharḥ, tafsīr*) of the five works of Aristotle he deemed central with regard to his purpose: the books on demonstration (*Analytica posteriora*; hereafter *An. post.*), on natural processes (*Physica*), on the soul (*De anima*), on the celestial sphere and the superlunary and sublunary universe (*De caelo*), and the principles of being (*Metaphysica*). At the very time when he finished the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, he started on the *Great Commentary on the Book of Demonstration* (completed in 1180), the fundamental work on the conditions, and limits, of the acquisition of rational knowledge through demonstration. Taking up the method of the ancients, the literal commentary of late Hellenism, which for Peripatetic and

Neoplatonist alike had become the principle vehicle of philosophic argument and innovation, Averroes returns to re-establishing the true sense of Aristotle's text from the bottom up. The work of Aristotle is living proof of the highest perfection of the human species, an encouragement taken by the author to pursue his final aim (*Great Commentary on De anima*; Averroes 1953: 433).

METAPHYSICS

Among the principal points Averroes raised against Avicenna is the subject and scope of first philosophy. The Aristotelian concept of the science of *Meta ta physika* as a science of being *qua* being had been focused by the Neoplatonist commentators on the specification of first philosophy, looking into the first and noblest beings: eternal, intelligible and unmoved essences (as opposed to physics, which looks into mobile beings, eternal or corruptible). Early Islamic philosophy – al-Kindi and his school – had adopted this from the Alexandrian school as a model of rational theology, but identified the One and first cause and the first intellect, legitimizing demonstrative science as a vindication of monotheism. Then al-Farabi, and following him Avicenna, in redefining the Aristotelian metaphysics of being *qua* being, brought the Platonic subject matter of philosophy – the immaterial transcendentals – under the sway of this science. Averroes followed suit, but in his early *Epitome*, he already contends with Avicenna about the autarchy of demonstration in metaphysics. He agrees that it is the task of the metaphysician to examine the ultimate causes of being with regard to the deity and the divine, that is, the immaterial things, but only after the physicist has dealt with the material causes and those of motion and has proved the existence of an immaterial first cause of motion. No other science was able to prove this point. Only then could metaphysics go on to determine the efficient and final causes as first principles. In interpreting Aristotle's statement "that one cannot demonstrate the proper principles of everything" (*An. post.* I.9, 76a16–17), Averroes explains that this does not mean that any of the particular nether sciences is not able to demonstrate the causes of its subject matter at all. Aristotle meant that it cannot provide proof of its subject *simpliciter*, that is, of both its existence and cause. Since "it is impossible to know what a thing is if we are ignorant whether it is" (*An. post.* II.8, 93a20), each science must ascertain the existence of its matter from immediate evidence or deduction based on the lower domains of knowledge. But it can infer the causes of its particular matter only from induction: valid if the underlying sign (*dalil*, σημεῖον) is a valid *causa cognoscendi*, but lacking absolute necessity. Only from the perspective of the higher *genus* will the *causa cognoscendi* and the *causa essendi* coincide, but the higher science, while it can demonstrate the reason why, often does not know the fact. This holds for metaphysics *a fortiori*. The first philosophy does not demonstrate *simpliciter* the principles of the sciences, but can demonstrate such principles only in as far as

they are of existents (being *qua* being), not in so far as they are proper to the particular subjects of the sciences. Metaphysics explains absolute being in as far as this is the highest *genus* common to all subjects of the particular sciences. But these particular sciences, and only these, yield the specific causes for the existence of their proper subjects, and the reasons specific to the subject of a particular science are the concern of that science. Avicenna failed to understand this when he maintained that physical science takes the concepts of prime matter and the first cause from metaphysics: physics explains prime matter and the first cause (the Prime Mover) ‘through signs’ in that these are causes of motion, not in that they are classes of being.

The existence of matter and the laws of motion are presupposed, not demonstrated by metaphysics, and there is no way to prove the existence of the Prime Mover but through the arguments of this science; *pace* Avicenna, this is not within the grasp of metaphysics. By relegating his proofs of the first cause to metaphysics, he exposed his argument to the critique of al-Ghazali. By disregarding existence as a criterion of demonstrable truth, he disavowed reason.

Whereas the Aristotelian tradition argued for the first cause *qua* first mover by way of motion, Avicenna established the existence of the first cause *qua* necessary existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), a concept occurring in the works of some of his predecessors, but developed by him to become a cornerstone of metaphysics. In his later writings, Avicenna rejected outright the cosmological argument:

It is nonsensical to arrive at the First Truth by way of motion and by way of the fact that it is a principle of motion, and [then] to undertake from this [position] to make it into a principle for the essences, because these people [Aristotle and his commentators] offered nothing more than establishing it as a mover, not that it is a principle for what exists. (Avicenna, *Book of Fair Judgment*, trans. in Gutas 1988: 264)

The ontological distinction between necessary (uncreated) and contingent (created) being is based on the principal difference between essence and existence, existence being accorded to the essences by the necessary being – the One and First – in which both coincide. But this very distinction offered a convenient handle to al-Ghazali, who postulated the intervention of the divine will to confer existence on the possible essences: creation.

Avicenna’s mistake – in the eyes of Averroes’ meta-critique – is the mistake of a philosopher pretending to pull himself up by his bootstraps. The possible (*versus* actual) into which Avicenna divides existence is “a quality in a thing, different from the thing in which the possibility is”, “not an entity actually outside the soul” (Averroes 1954: 118ff.). Hence it could be denied altogether to exist outside the human mind in the external world, as al-Ghazali argued in his *Tahāfut*: as universals exist only in the mind, “it can be said that possibility is a form which exists in the mind, not in the actual substances [of the external world]” (Averroes 1954: 64).

In reality, Averroes replies, the possible can be truly said only of things that are potentially actual, that is, of substances: “The possible existent in bodily substance must be preceded by the necessary existent in bodily substance” (*ibid.*: 254). There is no realm of pure form, nor a realm of pure matter; the bodily form is the dimensionality of first matter – a potentiality in act. It is not possible, as Avicenna says, “that there should be something contingent by its essence but necessary on account of something else”, but:

motion [in the case of the motion of the heavens] can be necessary by something else and contingent by itself, the reason being that its existence comes from something else, namely the mover; if motion is eternal, it must be so on account of an immovable mover, either by essence or by accident. (Comm. on *Metaphysics* XII, in Averroes 1984: 165)

This is said in connection with the problem of the eternity of the world, the principal point of contention between physical philosophy and the religious worldview. The metaphysician must stick to physics – to the external world – for incontrovertible arguments based on reality. Metaphysics cannot prove its own principles, but can only deduce from signs (*dalā'il*); we cannot proceed except from what is best known to our minds to what is certain by itself.

SOUL AND INTELLECT

In order to perceive the true subjects of metaphysics, the separate intelligences that move the celestial spheres, and the pure entelechy of the Prime Mover, the philosopher is, again, dependent on the psychological and physical parts of natural science. The only way, then, to arrive at the highest degree of cognition, and thus at the ultimate happiness available to humanity, is through the theoretical sciences: demonstrative reasoning founded on, and directed towards, real substances, essence undivided from existence.

The universal is not (as in the theory that al-Ghazali presumed to refute) the object of knowledge: through it, the things become known. The principles of demonstration are not themselves acquired through demonstration, but are known through the agency of the intellect (*tu'lam bi-l-'aql*), since only the intellect is a stronger safeguard of truth (*akthar tahqīqan*) than demonstration: contrary to the successive assemblage of data in discursive thinking, the agent intellect opens the mind's speculation, through the universals illuminating the mind's images as light does to the objects of vision among the sensibles, to the contemplation of God: the separate intellect thinking himself in eternally actual thought.

Whenever this happens – and this results from the highest activity of reason – the active intellect informs the material intellect, the expression (or 'place') in human beings of this universal and eternal intellectual principle, and thus

constitutes the speculative intellect in the individual human being; the intelligible is the eternal form of the material intellect universally, and at the same time the transitory form of the speculative intellect individually, and in either respect a self-thinking subject identical with its intelligible object in the act of thought. It is the act of an eternal principle, but in substance different from its own, generated and corruptible. “In this way only” the incorruptible, separate forms may be thought of as conjoining with the corruptible, contingent nature of human beings, and, “as Themistius said, man will become similar to God in that he is all beings in some way and knows them in a way; because beings are nothing but His knowing [them], and the cause of beings is nothing but His knowing” (1953: III 500ff.).

But the final *assimilatio Dei* of human beings through reason is conceived metaphorically (*quoquo modo*) and obliquely in a citation from Themistius, as the final goal of humanity’s movement towards universal knowledge, to be realized, if at all, in a transitory moment of truth. It is not a union of humanity with God; the union to which the Şūfiyya pretends or at which the Şūfiyya aims cannot reach even this degree, but only the demonstrative sciences will open the way towards this “natural perfection”, which may yield “a quasi-divine perfection of man”. It is not possible that a generated and corruptible substance should conjoin substantially with the separate, eternal forms in the union of self-thinking thought; in this the human soul – the form of a corruptible body – is different from the separate intellects moving the celestial bodies. This led al-Farabi, in a famous passage of his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (now lost, but quoted by Ibn Bājja and Averroes), to deny the possibility of a conjunction between the separate forms or intelligences with the intellect in human beings. Ibn Bājja objected, but with faulty arguments. In several stages, Averroes found his final analysis of the intellect, referring to the true understanding of Aristotle. The material intellect is not subject to generation and corruption, but is the eternal and universal counterpart of the agent intellect; the agent intellect is not the form, but the agent of the intellect in humans (otherwise, al-Farabi’s argument would hold): acting in us as ‘form for us’ in the process of abstracting universals from the material forms and their representations in the mind. The speculative intellect in human beings, under this agency, projects images onto the receptacle of the mind. The material intellect, then, is not subject to generation and corruption: not a material intellect of each individual (*pace* Alexander), but one unique and eternal principle, eternally and universally prepared to conjoin with the Forms.

But this conjunction is actualized in the speculative intellects of individual minds: individual not *qua* matter (which is universal), but *qua* form (the *intentio intellecta*) in the multiple images of thought. The material intellect, one and singular with respect to the one and singular agent intellect, cannot be separated from the corporeal forms in the imagination, the origin of its becoming actual, of the individual. At any given time, however, human beings will think and will thus provide forms to this universal intellect: the universal matter of the universal species of humanity. In this, that is, in studying the speculative sciences, human beings will

“help each other”, and it can be assumed that the intelligibles, being eternal, will at all times be informing a philosopher’s thought, “for, since it is the case that wisdom exists in some way proper to human beings ... it is deemed impossible that the whole habitable world should abandon philosophy” (Averroes 1953: 408).

Philosophy, the highest activity of reason in human beings, participates in the eternity of the human species. In this, “when the human perfection is reached, the intellect is bared of potentiality”, and “since it is impossible that at any one time we should not be thinking by it, it remains that when this intellect is free from potentiality, we are thinking by it in that this is an act of its very substance, and this is the ultimate felicity” (Averroes 1932, 1942, 1948: 1490).

The ultimate happiness is in ultimate knowledge; but the highest perfection to be conceived will obtain “when this intellect is free from potentiality, and we think by it through the activity of its own substance: this is the ultimate happiness” (*ibid.*), and this is not the way of thinking in an individual mortal human. The philosopher is on his way, by engaging in the activity proper to human beings, to accomplish this “movement toward conjunction”. Demonstrative philosophy is not just a method to an end; it is a way of life that makes human beings worthy of the divine gift of reason. But Averroes divides severely between the divine intellect, constituting reality by its knowing, and humanity’s quest for the comprehension of the separate intelligibles, depending for its science on the material of sense-perception: not a divine, but a human, perfection. There is no way to asserting, in this critique of pure reason based on demonstration, the immortality of the individual soul; only the human species is eternal, as are the separate, Agent and Material, eternal intellects.

Convinced that philosophy, representing the totality of rational science, will accept only the evidence of the principles deduced by reason, and that he must exercise the demonstrative method (the *burhān*) alone, Averroes excludes revelation from his quest for absolute truth. Religion is true; religions are “obligatory, since they lead towards wisdom in a way universal to all human beings, for philosophy leads only a certain number of intelligent people to the knowledge of happiness” (Averroes 1954: 360); but religion is just a metaphor of the absolute truth open to the philosopher.

Aristotle, the greatest of philosophers, led humanity on the way to a truth beyond the limit of any individual human being: the final assimilation to God, and the ultimate bliss to be pursued, although never attained by an individual reason embodied in a mortal vessel.¹

1. For a survey of the works of Averroes, their medieval Latin and Hebrew versions, editions and modern translations, see Endress (1999b). A current bibliography is offered by the project Averroes Latinus, of the University of Cologne, on its internet site: www.thomasinst.uni-koeln.de/averroes/index.htm (accessed May 2009).

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On ARISTOTELIANISM see also Chs 4, 11. On COSMOLOGY see also Chs 4, 16; Vol. 1, Chs 6, 8, 14, 17. On ISLAM see also Vol. 3, Ch. 15. On LAW see also Ch. 8; Vol. 3, Ch. 12. On METAPHYSICS see also Vol. 3, Ch. 8. On REASON see also Chs 11, 12, 16, 18; Vol. 3, Chs 8, 12, 16, 21; Vol. 4, Chs 4, 8.

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