

## INTENTIONALITY IN MEDIEVAL ARABIC PHILOSOPHY

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### I. INTRODUCTION: THE ARABIC ORIGINS OF INTENTIONALITY

It has long been a truism of the history of philosophy that intentionality is an invention of the medieval period. In light of the explicit homage that Brentano pays to the scholastic tradition in his revival of intentionality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this is, of course, hardly surprising.<sup>1</sup> Within this standard narrative, the central place of Arabic philosophy has always been acknowledged, at least to the extent of noting that the Latin term *intentio* purports to be a translation of the Arabic term *ma'nā*.<sup>2</sup> Still, the details of the Arabic contribution to the theory of intentionality remain obscure, even amongst specialists of Islamic philosophy. Part of this obscurity stems from the intrinsic difficulty of the Arabic material itself: the origins of Arabic accounts of intentionality are murky, and there is no

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<sup>1</sup> FRANZ BRENTANO, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, A. C. RANCURELLO, D. B. TERRELL, AND L. L. MCALISTER (trans.), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1973 (translation of *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, 1874), pp. 88-89.

There have, of course, been a number of attempts by historians of ancient philosophy to find theories of intentionality latent in ancient philosophy. See in particular the following articles by VICTOR CASTON: *Aristotle and the Problem of Intentionality*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», 58 (1998), pp. 249–98; *Something and Nothing: The Stoics on Concepts and Universals*, «Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy», 17 (1999), pp. 145–213; *Connecting Traditions: Augustine and the Greeks on Intentionality*, in DOMINIK PERLER, (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, Brill, Leiden 2001 («Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters», 76), pp. 23-48; *Intentionality in Ancient Philosophy*, in E. N. ZALTA, (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/intentionality-ancient/>>. Despite these efforts, however, the explicit formulation of the notion of intentionality, and in particular the terminology of ‘intentions’, are recognized as indisputably medieval.

<sup>2</sup> The common source for claims regarding the translation of *ma'nā* and other terms as *intentio* is KWAME GYEKYE, *The Terms 'Prima Intentio' and 'Secunda Intentio' in Arabic Logic*, «Speculum», 46 (1971), pp. 32-38; Gyekye is in turn a main source for CHRISTIAN KNUDSEN, *Intentions and Impositions*, in N. KRETZMANN ET AL. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982, pp. 479-95.

single, canonical account of intentionality shared by all the *falāsifah*.<sup>3</sup> In this paper I have two major aims which I hope will offer a partial remedy to this situation: the first is to sketch out the fundamentals of the theory of intentionality as it appears in the linguistic, metaphysical, and psychological writings of the major Islamic philosophers known to the West, namely, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes); the second is to look at the applications of their general theories of intentionality to the realm of sense perception. I have chosen to focus on perception rather than on intellectual understanding for two reasons. The first is because I believe that one of the main sources of confusion regarding Arabic theories of intentionality is the pervasive conflation of the *general* theory of intentionality with the theory that identifies the proper objects of the internal sense faculty of estimation (*wahm/aestimatio*) as *ma'ānī* 'intentions'.<sup>4</sup> The second is because it is in their application of the general theory of intentionality to the senses—both internal and external—that major differences emerge in the way that Avicenna and Averroes understand the nature of intentions and intentional being.

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<sup>3</sup> This is especially true regarding the earlier use of *ma'nā* as a technical term amongst the theologians or *mutakallimūn*, and the question of what, if any, is its relation to the adoption of *ma'nā* as a technical term by the *falāsifah*. For discussions of *ma'nā* in *kalām*, see H. A. WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1976, pp. 147-197; RICHARD FRANK, *Al-Ma'nā: Some Reflections on the Technical Meanings of the Term in the Kalām and its Use in the Physics of Mu'ammār*, «Journal of the American Oriental Society», 87 (1967), pp. 248-59; JOSEF VAN ESS, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra : eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens in frühen Islam*, Bd. 3, De Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 1992, pp. 74-83.

<sup>4</sup> While the practice of using the term 'intention' to denote the objects of an internal sense faculty originates with Avicenna, Averroes too continues to employ the term 'intention' to denominate the objects of the cogitative and memorative faculties, even though he rejects Avicenna's estimative faculty in animals.

## II. THE GENERAL THEORY OF INTENTIONALITY IN ARABIC PHILOSOPHY

In order to explore the Arabic roots of the theory of intentionality, it may be helpful to sketch out the main features that have, since Brentano, provided the groundwork for theories of intentionality. The following three theses seem to be common to most recent proponents of intentionality, and of these the first two seem to be most fundamental:

1. Object-directedness: Mental acts are directed towards objects distinct from the perceiver.
2. Mental existence: A special mode of being—*esse intentionale* or ‘intentional inexistence’, to use Brentano’s phrase—is proper to the objects of cognition inasmuch as they are cognized.
3. Consciousness: Intentionality is the distinctive property of consciousness: all and only conscious states are intentional.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to these three core theses, theories of intentionality are often associated with a fourth issue, namely:

4. Knowledge of non-existents: Intentional existence is invoked to solve the problem of how we can be said to know objects that do not exist in the external world.<sup>6</sup>

Now the first two theses—the object-directedness and mental existence theses—are central features of the accounts of intentionality for all of the major philosophers from the

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<sup>5</sup> This overview is derived from the article by PIERRE JACOB, *Intentionality*, in EDWARD N. ZALTA (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008)*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/intentionality/>: «... Brentano sketches an entire research programme based on three distinct theses. According to the first thesis, it is constitutive of the phenomenon of intentionality, as it is exhibited by mental states such as loving, hating, desiring, believing, judging, perceiving, hoping and many others, that these mental states are directed towards things different from themselves. According to the second thesis, it is characteristic of the objects towards which the mind is directed by virtue of intentionality that they have the property which Brentano calls intentional inexistence. According to the third thesis, intentionality is the mark of the mental: all and only mental states exhibit intentionality».

<sup>6</sup> A fifth thesis, Representationalism, is also added in MICHAEL DUMMETT, *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1993, p. 31: «It is but a short step from such a position [i.e., that non-existents have intentional inexistence] to the thesis that the object of *any* mental act is to be considered as enjoying only mental inexistence, but that it *represents* the external object, if there is one.» The representationalist thesis seems to be more relevant to the Latin tradition than to the Arabic. While representationalist language can be found in Arabic accounts of cognition, there is no theory corresponding to the Latin notion of intelligible species.

classical Arabic tradition. As for the consciousness thesis, it is not a prominent feature in any Arabic accounts of intentionality, and it is explicitly rejected by Averroes, who happily attributes intentionality to non-cognitive beings, such as the media of sensation, as I will show in the second part of my paper.<sup>7</sup> The problem of non-existents also seems to be important for some Arabic authors, and it appears to have been a motivating factor in Avicenna's insistence on the reality of mental being in the *Metaphysics* of his *Healing*. For the purposes of the present article, however, I will leave aside consideration of this aspect of intentionality.<sup>8</sup>

Arabic authors tend to expound the two fundamental theses of intentionality in different sorts of contexts, each of which has a different legacy in the West. The object-directedness thesis emerges most clearly from logical texts; the mental-existence thesis by contrast tends to be developed in psychological or metaphysical writings.

### **A. Intentions and Object-Directedness in Avicenna's Logic**

It has become fairly standard in histories of medieval philosophy to declare that *intentio* is a mistranslation of the Arabic *ma'nā*. Now, strictly speaking this is true inasmuch as *ma'nā* literally means 'meaning' or 'thought'—as expressed in phrases such as «by x I

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<sup>7</sup> For a fuller consideration of the role played by the intentionality of sensation in Averroes's philosophy, see D. L. Black, *Models of the Mind: Metaphysical Presuppositions of the Averroist and Thomistic Accounts of Intellection*, «Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale», 15 (2004), pp. 319–52; and *Averroes on Spirituality and Intentionality in Sense Perception*, forthcoming in P. Adamson (ed.), *In the Age of Averroes: Arabic Thought at the End of the Classical Period*, Warburg Institute Publications, London.

<sup>8</sup> Avicenna deploys his account of mental existence to refute what he believes to be a reification of non-being ('*adam*') found in Mu'tazilite accounts of bodily resurrection. See AVICENNA, *The Metaphysics of the Healing (Al-Shifā': Al-Ilāhiyyāt)*, ed. and trans. M. E. Marmura, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT 2005, 1.5, nn. 13-18, pp. 25-27. For a consideration of Avicenna's views on non-existent and fictional beings, see D. L. BLACK, *Avicenna on the Ontological and Epistemic Status of Fictional Beings*, «Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale», 8 (1997), pp. 425–45.

mean *y.*»<sup>9</sup> But as an *interpretation* of the fundamental idea behind the generic and technical use of *ma'nā* in Arabic, *intentio* is an entirely legitimate Latin rendition of the term, and one that is *explicitly* justified by a little-known Avicennian passage that was not itself translated into Latin.<sup>10</sup> This passage occurs in the part of Avicenna's *Healing* that parallels Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, where Avicenna is presenting his account of the Aristotelian claim that vocal sounds signify the 'affections' [or in Arabic, 'traces' or 'impressions'] of the soul (*pathēmata tēs psuchēs/āthār allatī fī al-nafs*):

What is emitted vocally (*bi-al-ṣawt*) signifies what is in the soul, and these are called what are called 'impressions' (*āthāran*), whereas what is in the soul signifies things (*al-umūr*), and these are what are called 'meanings' (*ma'ānī*), that is, the things intended by the soul (*maqāṣada li-nafs*). In the same way, the impressions too, by analogy to the expressions (*bi-al-qiyās ilā al-alfāz*), are intentions.<sup>11</sup>

In this important passage, Avicenna clearly links the concept of a meaning or *ma'nā* to the mind's 'intention' to signify some object in the external world. In this context, it is

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<sup>9</sup> The main source for the mistranslation claim is Gyekye, *The Terms 'Prima Intentio'* cit., p. 36: «Etymologically, 'conceptus,' rather than 'intentio,' would be a better translation for *ma'nā*, which means meaning or concept; but it was 'intentio' that was used.» While this article is valuable for showing how the translation of *ma'nā* as *intentio* sometimes led to confusion in texts where *intentio* was in fact a translation of the Arabic term *qaṣd*—'intention' in the sense of 'purpose'. But his speculations regarding the origins of the distinction between first and second intentions, and his general claims regarding the equivalence of *intentio*, *noema*, and *ma'qūl*, are highly speculative and based on a very limited selection of texts. It is especially misleading to claim that *ma'nā* is synonymous with *ma'qūl* as the counterpart of the Greek *noema*, since this implies that intentions are limited to the *intelligible* realm.

<sup>10</sup> It is not clear whether explanation of the meaning of *ma'nā* given in the text from the *Interpretation* which I discuss in what follows is in fact the source for the Latin rendition of the term as *intentio*, or whether the convergence of the text with the translators' practice is simply coincidence. It is certainly possible that the *Interpretation* passage was known to the Latin translators of Avicenna, even if they did not produce a Latin version of the text itself, and that it influenced their translation of other Arabic texts.

<sup>11</sup> AVICENNA, *Al-Shifā': Al-'Ibārah (Interpretation)*, ed. M. El-Khodeiri and I. Madkour, Dar el-Katib Al-'Arabi, Cairo 1970, pp. 2-3. [Except where otherwise indicated, all translations in this paper are my own.] Note that Avicenna uses what would be the equivalent of the Latin *intentiones*, i.e., a plural noun. This Avicennian text explicitly undercuts the claim of P. ENGELHARDT, in *Intentio*, in J. RITTER ET AL. (eds.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Schwabe, Basel 1971, Bd. 4, pp. 466ff., that the Latin *intentio* does not correspond to the Arabic *maqṣūd*.

the extramental things or objects themselves that are primarily denominated as ‘intentions’, inasmuch as they are the referents of a deliberate act of signification by the mind. Still, things are only called intentions inasmuch as they are understood and signified linguistically—so ‘intention’ is not simply synonymous with ‘object’.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the ‘traces’ or ‘impressions in the soul’ are intentions secondarily, inasmuch as they function as the objects of signification for the expressions, i.e., what the expressions intend to signify.<sup>13</sup> The fundamental point here, then, is that we can label as an ‘intention’ anything that functions as a *significandum* relative to either a mental or a linguistic sign.<sup>14</sup>

These Avicennian remarks are of enormous importance for explaining and justifying the use of the terminology of ‘intentions’ in the West, and for linking the theory of intentionality to a linguistic context. Moreover, in this text Avicenna also forges a close connection between the object-directedness and mental-existence of intentions. In his opening account of the nature of the ‘impressions in the soul’ which mediate between language and the extramental things it signifies, Avicenna explicitly alludes to his

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<sup>12</sup> The link between intentions and the extramental referent of language is traceable to the Arabic version of the *De interpretatione*: at 16a6-8, the *pragmata* of which the affections of the soul are said to be likenesses (*homoiōmata*)—are rendered into Arabic as *al-ma‘ānī*. See the text as found in AL-FĀRĀBĪ, *Sharḥ al-‘Ibārah (Long Commentary on De Interpretatione)*, ed.. W. Kutsch and S. Marrow, Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut, 1960, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Note that Avicenna uses ‘signify’ (*dalla*) for all these relations, including that between things and their psychological traces; Later Avicenna stipulates that the traces are natural signs rather than conventional ones (*Interpretation*, p. 5). Fārābī, by contrast, confines the signification relation to language, picking up on Aristotle’s claim that impressions are *likenesses* (= *homoiōmata/mathālāt*) of the things (*Sharḥ al-‘Ibārah*, pp. 24-25).

<sup>14</sup> There is an important exception to this rule, however, in that Avicenna does not extend it to cover the relation between written and spoken impressions—although writing is said to *signify* expressions, written signs are not intentions.

metaphysical doctrine according to which there are two distinct but equally authentic modes of existence, one in external reality and the other in the mind:

Things are sometimes impressed in the soul after this in accordance with what sensation has conveyed, and these are either the sense impressions [themselves], although they have been transformed from their sensible forms into abstraction (*ilā al-tajrīd*), or else or they have been impressed from another direction. But there is no need to prove this in logic. So the things have (*li-l-umūr*) an existence in singulars (*wujūd fī al-'ayān*), and they have an existence in the soul (*fī al-nafs*) which brings about impressions in the soul.<sup>15</sup>

As is the custom amongst Arabic philosophers, Avicenna repudiates the practice of psychologizing within logic, beyond sketching out the barest background. All the logician needs to recognize is that the things which language signifies have a twofold mode of existence, one external to the soul and one within it, the latter being characteristic of the «impressions in the soul» to which Aristotle alludes. The objects of linguistic signification can be called ‘intentions’ in either of these two modes of existence. Thus, to understand the ontological foundations for the mental existence thesis that grounds Avicenna’s general theory of intentionality, we need to turn to his metaphysical and psychological writings.

### **B. Existence in Souls and Minds**

The idea that the quiddities or natures of things admit of both mental and extramental modes of existence was prominent in several Avicennian texts known to the West—most importantly Book 1, chapter 12 of the *Isagoge*; Book 1, chapter 5 of the *Metaphysics*; and the first two chapters of its fifth book.<sup>16</sup> These texts provide the main foundation for

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<sup>15</sup> AVICENNA, *Interpretation*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> In these texts Avicenna regularly refers to the quiddity (*māhiyyah/quidditas*) to which mental existence attaches as a *ma'nā*, a fact that is often but not consistently reflected in the Latin translations.

the medieval notion of *esse intentionale*, a notion that for Avicenna encompasses all forms of cognitive being ‘in the soul’.<sup>17</sup> In *Metaphysics* 1.5, for example, Avicenna first differentiates between the intention or reality as existent ‘in singulars’ (*fī al-a ‘yān*),<sup>18</sup> and as existent ‘in souls’ (*fī al-anfus*); slightly later in the same passage, Avicenna parses psychological existence to include existence in ‘the estimation and the intellect’ (*fī al-wahm wa-al-‘aql*),<sup>19</sup> broadening the realm of mental being to include the internal senses.

To the extent that the theory of intentionality is rooted in the recognition of a specific mode of mental existence on a par with extramental being, Avicenna’s account of the distinction between the essence or quiddity and its two modes of existence provides the ontological foundation for the medieval doctrine of *esse intentionale*. Yet while Avicenna’s texts do justify the application of the language of intentionality to the realm of mental existence, Avicenna himself seems to prefer to speak of the quiddity, nature, or reality itself—rather than its *intention*—as the subject of mental existence:<sup>20</sup>

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Other terms are ‘thing’ (*shay’res*); ‘reality’ (*ḥaqīqah /certitudo*), and ‘nature’ (*ṭabī’ah /natura*). In a few cases where the Arabic has *ma’nā*, the Latin substitutes *intellectum*, especially where the context clearly indicates an intelligible intention.

<sup>17</sup> The term *dhihn*, ‘mind’ often indicates the intellect, though it need not; the proper term for intellect, i.e., the equivalent of the Greek *nous*, is ‘*aql*’.

<sup>18</sup> Usually the Latin renders this phrase as *in singularibus*, but sometimes *in sensibilibus* is used. See, for example, AVICENNA, *Metaphysics* 5.2, n.1, p. 157; medieval Latin version in *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divina*, ed. S. Van Riet, 3 vols., Peeters, Louvain/ Brill, Leiden 1977-83, vol. 2, p. 238.

<sup>19</sup> AVICENNA, *Metaphysics* 1.5, n. 11, pp. 24-25; *Philosophia Prima*, pp. 35-36. See also AVICENNA, *Al-Shifā’ : al-Madkhal (Isagoge)*, ed. G. Anawati, M. El-Khodeiri, F. al-Ahwani, and I. Madkour, Al-Maṭba’ah al-Amīriyyah, Cairo, 1952, 1.12, p. 65; translation by M. E. MARMURA, *Avicenna’s Chapter on Universals in the Isagoge of his Shifā’*, in *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*, ed. A. T. Welch and P. Cachia, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1979, pp. 34-56, especially p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> There appears to be one exception to Avicenna’s emphasis on mental being as involving the existence of the quiddity itself in the mind, and this is the case of human knowledge of separate substances. In *Metaphysics* 3.8, Avicenna notes that since the essences of separate substances are indeed separate, they cannot become forms for human souls: in such cases, «it is only the intentions of their quiddities, not the

The apprehension (*idrāk*) of a thing is for its reality [*ḥaqīqah*=*certitudo*, i.e., the quiddity], by which it is perceived, to be represented (*mutamaththalah*) in the perceiver who observes (*yushāhidu-hā*) it. And this reality is the very reality of the thing external to the perceiver when he perceives it.<sup>21</sup>

For Avicenna, then, it is the quiddity itself that enjoys intentional or mental as well as physical being. With Averroes, by contrast, it will become routine to describe all cognitive objects at all levels of abstraction as *ma'ānī/intentiones*, and it is no doubt Averroes's practice that is reflected in the predominance of this terminology in the Latin West.<sup>22</sup>

### C. Averroes: From Quiddities to Intentions

The new prominence that the notion of intentions takes on in Averroes's writings appears to be linked to two philosophical rifts which divide him from his Persian predecessor: (1) the repudiation of the essence-existence distinction in metaphysics, on the grounds that it makes existence into an extrinsic accident; and (2) the return to a more traditional theory of abstraction in his cognitive psychology.<sup>23</sup> These two doctrinal shifts converge to

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quiddities themselves (*ma'ānī māhīyāt-hā lā-dhawāt-hā; intentiones quidditatum suarum, non ipsae*), that is realized in human intellects.» Avicenna's explanation of how this comes about in the absence of preparatory images is unclear. He argues that the separate intellects must make *some* impression on us, and it is these impressions, which Avicenna refers to as 'imitations' (*al-āthār al-muḥākīyah*) of them, that are the causes of our knowledge in this case. See AVICENNA, *Metaphysics* 3.8, nn.8-9, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> AVICENNA, *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-al-tanbīhāt (Le livre des directives et remarques)*, ed. J. Forget, Brill, Leiden, 1892, p. 122. Avicenna proceeds to consider the case of mental beings that don't actually exist in singulars, though in this case he is not so much concerned with fictional beings as with geometrical hypotheses. In these cases the pattern or likeness of its reality (*mithāl ḥaqīqati-hi*) is said to be impressed in the perceiver himself without being different from him.

<sup>22</sup> The widespread use of the term "intention" to denominate the object known is a general feature of the Andalusian philosophical tradition, and it is also found in the writings of Averroes's predecessor Avempace (Ibn Bājjah), who is probably the immediate influence on Averroes in this regard. See IBN BĀJJAḤ, *Kitāb al-naḥs*, ed. M. S. H. Al-Ma'sūmī, Damascus, 1960, pp. 94-95; 133-38; 143; note that most of these references come from the chapter on the imagination (*al-takhayyul*).

<sup>23</sup> For Averroes's rejection of the Avicennian distinction between essence and existence, see AVERROES, *Tafsīr mā ba'd al-ṭabī'ah (Long Commentary on the Metaphysics)*, ed. M. Bouyges, 4 vols.,

produce a fundamental revision in the Averroist account of intentions. Whereas Avicenna emphasizes that it is the selfsame nature or quiddity that is instantiated in both external and mental being, Averroes will build his account of intentionality around the principle that  $x$  and the intention of  $x$  are two distinct things—as Averroes says, «the intention of colour is other than colour» (*intentio enim coloris alia est a colore*).<sup>24</sup> Intentional being is no less a mode of existence than it was for Avicenna; but for Averroes the subject which possesses intentional being is not the selfsame subject as the one that possesses non-intentional being outside the soul:

We find that the division into actuality and potentiality of the sensible and intelligible objects which exist outside the soul corresponds to these two divisions in the soul. ... If this division required that the intentions in the soul (*ma 'ānī allatī fī al-nafs*) must be the very same things which are outside the soul, they would be found in the soul with the matter which is outside it, as well as in abstraction from the matter. Were they to exist in the soul with the matter, then one who thought of a stone would become a stone, and one who thought of fire would be burnt.<sup>25</sup>

The distinction that Averroes forges between the thing and its intention in the foregoing passage from the *Middle Commentary* continues to be evoked in the *Long Commentary* to support a number of central doctrines within Averroes's version of Aristotelian cognitive

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Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut, 1938–52, 1: 313–14.; 3: 1279–80; see also AVERROES, *Averroès: Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (L'Incohérence de l'Incohérence)*, ed. M. Bouyges, Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut, 1930, pp. 196–202; 302–305; 331–33; translation by Simon Van Den Bergh, *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, 2 vols., E. J. Gibb Memorial Trust, London, 1954, pp. 117–21; 179–81; 198–99. For an overview of Averroes's various texts on intentions and a discussion of some of the background, see DAVID WIRMER, *Der Begriff der Intention und seine erkenntnistheoretische Funktion in den De-anima-Kommentaren des Averroes*, in MATTHIAS LUTZ-BACHMANN ET AL. (eds.), *Erkenntnis und Wissenschaft: Probleme der Epistemologie in der Philosophie des Mittelalter/Knowledge and Science, Problems of Epistemology in Medieval Philosophy*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2004, pp. 33–67.

<sup>24</sup> AVERROES, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros (Long Commentary on De anima)*, ed. F. S. Crawford, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge, MA, 1953, Bk. 2, comm. 121, p. 317.

<sup>25</sup> AVERROES, *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's «De Anima»*, ed. and trans. A. L. Ivry, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT 2002, p. 122, n. 313 (trans. modified).

psychology. Most notably it provides the grounding for his account of the ‘dual subject’ of cognition, one of the pillars of his argument in support of the controversial doctrine of the unicity of the intellect:

Therefore just as the colour which is in potency is not the first perfection of the colour which is the understood intention (*intentio comprehensa*), but the subject which is perfected through that colour is vision, so too the subject which is perfected through the understood thing is not the imagined intentions which are intelligibles in potency, but the material intellect which is perfected through the intelligibles.<sup>26</sup>

According to the theory of the dual subject sketched in this passage, the *intentiones* which are in the lower, moving faculty are the subjects of truth or referents which link the cognizer, either directly (in the case of sensation) or indirectly (in all other cases) to the external world. The process of cognition results in the production of a new *intentio* in the higher, recipient faculty, such that the new intention now becomes «one of the existents in the world» (*unum entium in mundo*).<sup>27</sup> Since the intention produced is indeed a new being or existent, it requires a subject for its existence, and that role is played by the relevant faculty in the cognizer (or, in the case of Averroes’s doctrine of the unicity of the intellect, the separate material intellect).

Averroes’s claim that intentions possess a special mode of being in virtue of their intentionality also has ramifications for his understanding of the reasons that justify positing an Agent Intellect. Averroes initially presents the standard account which

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<sup>26</sup> AVERROES, *Commentarium magnum*, Bk. 3 , comm. 5, p. 401.

<sup>27</sup> This is an echo of Fārābī. See AL-FĀRĀBĪ , *Risālah fī al-‘aql (Treatise on the Intellect)*, ed. M. Bouyges, Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut, 1948, pp. 17-18. See also D.L. BLACK, *Models of the Mind: Metaphysical Presuppositions of the Averroist and Thomistic Accounts of Intellection*, «Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale» ,15 (2004), pp. 319–52, esp. p. 339, n. 51; R. C. TAYLOR, *Abstraction in al-Fārābī*, «Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association»,80 (2006), pp. 151-168, esp. pp. 153-54, and p. 163 n. 20.

appeals to the fact that ‘imagined intentions’ (*intentiones ymaginatae*) are individuals and not universals; hence they are insufficient on their own to move the material intellect to understand immaterial intelligibles.<sup>28</sup> But when he comes to explain Aristotle’s comparison of the Agent Intellect to light, Averroes adds a new dimension to the explanation of why an additional agent cause is required to render images actually intelligible:

For when we find the same thing—namely, the imagined intentions (*intentiones ymaginatas*)—is transferred in its being from one order into another (*transferri in suo esse de ordine in ordinem*), we say that it is necessary that this occur through an agent and recipient cause. Therefore the recipient is material, and the agent is efficient.<sup>29</sup>

Because abstraction involves the transference of imagined intentions to a higher order of intentional being, it requires a further causal agent to effect the change. Like Avicenna, then, Averroes here clearly endorses the view that intentions occupy a special mode of existence unique to them *as* intentions; that is, he clearly interprets intentionality as a form of being or existence. Unlike Avicenna, however, Averroes is quite comfortable with the idea that an intention can be transferred to a higher level of being through the operations of an appropriate agent: it is the imagined intention itself that becomes an intelligible through the operation of abstraction. This, then, appears to be the counterpart of Averroes’s substitution of the intention for the quiddity as the primary subject of mental being: whereas the subjects of intentional and extramental being are the same for

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<sup>28</sup> AVERROES, *Commentarium magnum*, Bk. 3, comm. 17, pp. 438-9.

<sup>29</sup> AVERROES, *Commentarium magnum*, Bk. 3, comm. 17, p. 439.

Avicenna and distinct for Averroes, the levels of intentionality are causally continuous in Averroes, whereas for Avicenna they remain discrete.

### III. INTENTIONALITY AND THE SENSES

I would now like to turn to the role played by intentionality in Arabic accounts of the sense cognition, taken broadly to include the operations of both the external and internal senses.

I will begin with Avicenna's decision to denominate the objects of the estimative faculty (*wahm/estimatio*) as *ma'ānī* (*intentiones*), a decision that has led many interpreters to assume—mistakenly—that it is to Avicenna's account of estimation that one should look to find the Arabic underpinnings of the theory of intentionality.<sup>30</sup> I will then give a brief account of the intentionality of the external senses in Averroes's psychology and analyze the role that this doctrine plays in undermining the link between intentionality and consciousness.

#### A. Forms and Intentions: Avicenna's Estimative Power

While it is fairly clear that the estimative faculty and the terminology surrounding it is an Avicennian innovation, Avicenna himself provides us with no explicit account of why he chose the label *ma'ānī* to denominate the objects of that power. In characteristic fashion, Avicenna merely tells us that «it has become customary to call the thing apprehended by

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<sup>30</sup> The most egregious and influential example of this confusion is found in RICHARD SORABJI, *From Aristotle to Brentano: The Development of the Concept of Intentionality* in H. BLUMENTHAL AND H. ROBINSON, eds., *Aristotle and The Later Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy, supplementary volume, Clarendon, Oxford, 1991, pp. 227–259; esp. pp. 236–37. To counterbalance this misinterpretation, some scholars of Arabic philosophy have declared that Avicenna's theory of estimation has no bearing at all upon the problem of intentionality. In my view this is a hypercorrection that is also mistaken. For this reading, see DAG HASSE, *Avicenna's De anima in the Latin West*, The Warburg Institute, London 2000, pp. 127–53. Cf. WIRMER, *Der Begriff der Intention* cit., pp. 44–46, for remarks on Hasse on this point.

the sense a ‘form’ (*ṣūrah*), and the thing apprehended by the estimation an ‘intention’ (*ma‘nan*)». <sup>31</sup> Given that there is no evidence whatsoever of such a prior custom, the most obvious way to read this statement is to take it as Avicenna’s stipulation that this is the terminology that should become customary among all discerning philosophers henceforth. Since Avicenna doesn’t deign to explain his choice of vocabulary for the reader, then, I will attempt to provide an account on his behalf.

First let me turn to Avicenna’s characterization of estimative intentions as cognitive objects. According to Avicenna the intentions grasped by the estimative faculty have one key feature that differentiates them from the forms—the proper and common sensibles—perceived by the external and common senses and stored in the imagination.<sup>32</sup> That feature, as Avicenna consistently describes it, is that intentions are properties that are «not in their essences material» (*laysat hiya fī dhāti-hā bi-māddīyatīn*),<sup>33</sup> although they attach or adhere to sensible, material forms and are always perceived in conjunction with

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<sup>31</sup> AVICENNA, *Avicenna’s De anima, Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā’*, ed. F. Rahman, Oxford University Press, London, 1959; medieval Latin version in *Avicenna Latinus: Liber de anima, seu sextus de naturalibus*, ed. S. Van Riet, 2 vols, Louvain/ Brill, Leiden, 1968, 4.1, p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> The story regarding the terminology of intentions within the account of the internal senses is far more complicated in Averroes. Despite his rejection of a separate estimative faculty in animals, Averroes does accept the existence of a cerebral cogitative faculty unique to humans, and he assigns it the perception of an *individual intention* (*ma‘nā shakṣī*), which, like Avicenna, he contrasts with the external *form* of the perceived object, i.e., its proper and common sensible properties. The individual intention in Averroes is described as the core or fruit of a sensible object, i.e., the designated individual (such as Zayd), as distinct from his physical description, which is likened to the rinds that surround the fruit. On this see D. L. BLACK, *Memory, Time and Individuals in Averroes’s Psychology*, «Medieval Theology and Philosophy», 5 (1996), pp. 161–187.

<sup>33</sup> AVICENNA, *De anima*, 2.2, p. 60. This passage is mistranslated in the Latin in such a way as to undermine the immateriality of intentions: *apprehendit intentiones materiales quae non sunt in suis materiis* (Van Riet, p. 118). There is no *materiales* in the Arabic, and *in suis* should read *in seipsis*.

them.<sup>34</sup> While most readers of Avicenna since the Middle Ages have focused on the charming example of sheep fearing wolves that Avicenna provides to illustrate the function of estimation in animals, it is the property of being indifferent to matter that Avicenna isolates as defining an intention. In this respect estimative intentions are strikingly similar to Avicennian quiddities in their indifference to the nature of the subject in which they exist: while quiddities are indifferent to whether they are realized in mental or extramental being, intentions are indifferent to whether their substrata are material or abstract.<sup>35</sup>

Another feature of Avicenna's theory of sense perception further highlights the uniqueness of the estimative faculty and its objects: unlike Avempace (Ibn Bājjah) and Averroes, as well as many philosophers of the Latin tradition such as Aquinas, Avicenna does not subscribe to the view that sense perception involves either the spiritual reception of the sensible form or its intentional existence in the cognizer.<sup>36</sup> Avicenna's account of sense perception is thoroughly materialist, and he offers an elaborate set of arguments to prove that representation of material accidents requires the use of a physical organ that is in some way able to convey the spatial relations amongst the parts and properties of the

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<sup>34</sup> AVICENNA, *De anima* 1.5, pp. 43, 45; see also F. RAHMAN, *Avicenna's Psychology*, Oxford University Press, London, 1952, pp. 30-31, for an English translation of the corresponding passages in Avicenna's *Al-Najāh (Deliverance)*.

<sup>35</sup> On this point see D. L. BLACK, *Estimation in Avicenna: The Logical and Psychological Dimensions*, «Dialogue», 32 (1993), pp. 219–58, esp. pp. 222-23.

<sup>36</sup> I have been unable to find any application of the term *ma'nā* in the *De anima* of the *Shifā'* to describe the mode of reception proper to sensible alteration. This has also been noted by MARTIN TWEEDALE in *Origins of the Medieval Theory that Sensation is an Immaterial Reception of a Form*, «Philosophical Topics», 20 (1992), pp. 215–31, esp. 221. For the spirituality of sensation in Averroes and Avempace, see BLACK, *Averroes on Spirituality* cit.

perceived bodies.<sup>37</sup> These arguments, however, are entirely focused on the representational capacities of the imagination, and while Avicenna extends the reasoning to the estimative faculty in virtue of its need to perceive intentions when accompanied by imaginative forms, there is no indication whatsoever that intentions themselves are represented materially. Their materiality is cast solely as a function of the images to which they attach.<sup>38</sup>

From the foregoing analysis of the objects of estimation—the intentions themselves—it seems clear that estimative intentions are the sole items in the sphere of sense perception that meet the criteria for possessing intentional being, since they alone have no essential connection to matter in their own right. Thus, while the objects of the other external and internal senses are never completely free from the properties of physical being, estimative intentions are capable of existing in the soul and thereby displaying an intentional being similar to that enjoyed by universal intelligibles in the intellect. This, then, may explain why Avicenna explicitly mentions the estimative faculty as a locus for mental being in *Metaphysics* 1.5: «the intention of existence is permanently concomitant with [the intention of the thing], because the thing exists either in singulars or in the *estimative faculty* and the intellect.»<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Avicenna uses a diagram in which two smaller squares are placed on the left and right sides of a rectangle. He constructs a series of arguments designed to show that only a corporeal faculty could reproduce the relative positions of those squares. See *Avicenna's De anima*, 4.3, pp. 187-94. The diagram and arguments are repeated in chapter 8 of the *De anima* of the *Najāh*. For an English translation see RAHMAN, *Avicenna's Psychology* cit., pp. 41-45.

<sup>38</sup> This, of course, raises problems about the nature and basis of brain localization for the estimative and memorative faculties, but those problems are beyond the scope of the present article.

<sup>39</sup> AVICENNA, *Metaphysics*, 1.5, n. 11, p. 25 (emphasis added; trans. modified).

In sum, then, in the absence of any definitive explanation on Avicenna's part, it seems to me that we can offer the following as a plausible explanation of Avicenna's designation of the objects of estimation as intentions. Because intentions are in themselves essentially indifferent to materiality, they alone amongst the objects of the soul meet the conditions for enjoying mental or intentional as opposed to simple material being. In virtue of its ability to grasp such intentions—though always in association with material images—the estimative faculty can be identified as «the power which is in reality the internal percipient in the animal» (*qūwah hiya bi-al-ḥaqīqah al-mudrikah al-bāṭinah fī al-ḥayawān*).<sup>40</sup> It is in the estimative faculty, then, that sensible objects have whatever being in the soul they are able to possess, and hence the estimation and its objects count as intentions in a way that other items of sensible perception do not.

### **B. The Intentionality and Spirituality of Sensation in Averroes**

While Avicenna shows no interest at all in extending the scope of intentionality into the sensible realm beyond estimation, the Andalusian tradition enthusiastically embraced the idea that the senses receive forms spiritually and immaterially, and that this spiritual reception renders the objects of perception into intentions.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Averroes and Ibn Bājjah both extend the idea of spiritual, or at least quasi-spiritual, reception, to the media

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<sup>40</sup> AVICENNA, *Qanūn fī al-ṭibb (Canon of Medicine)*, ed. A. Zi'ur and E. Al-Qashsh, Mu'assasah Izz al-Din, Beirut, 1987, p. 96.

<sup>41</sup> The ultimate source for attributing intentionality to sensation is traceable to the version of the Arabic *De anima* that underlies the lemmata of Averroes's *Commentarium magnum*. In Michael Scot's Latin translation of *De anima* 2.12, Aristotle's description of sensation as a *logos* (424a24–28) is rendered as *intentio*, which almost certainly reflects *ma'nā*. See *Commentarium magnum*, Bk. 2, text 122, p. 318: *neque sensus est magnitudo, sed intentio [= Gr. alla logos tis] et virtus illius*.

of sensation, and in his *Long Commentary on the De anima*, Averroes even attributes intentionality to non-cognitive beings, such as the strings of an instrument.<sup>42</sup>

In his early works, Averroes offers an empirical argument in support of his extension of intentionality to the external senses and their media. This argument is based on a thesis that I call the ‘contraries principle’, which asserts that since the senses can perceive contraries simultaneously, and since bodies cannot actually possess contrary properties simultaneously, sensible change is not a wholly physical process: «As for those who are of the opinion that the forms of sense-objects are imprinted upon the soul in a corporeal manner, the absurdity of their view can be shown by the fact that the soul can receive the forms of contraries simultaneously, whereas this is not possible for bodies».<sup>43</sup> This reasoning is then extended to the media of perception, which Averroes argues must at least be quasi-spiritual in order to transmit sensible forms to the soul in such a way that they are received intentionally:

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<sup>42</sup> AVERROES, *Commentarium magnum*, Bk. 3, comm. 123, pp. 318-19: «sicut dissolvitur consonantia cordarum et neumata, que sunt *intentio* existens in ea...» (my emphasis).

<sup>43</sup> AVERROES, *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-ḥiss wa-al-mashūs (Epitome of the Parva naturalia)*, ed. H. Blumberg, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge, MA 1972, pp. 23–24; English translation by H. A. Blumberg, *Epitome of «Parva naturalia»*, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge MA 1961, pp. 15–16 (modified). The medieval Latin version is also available in the editions of E. Shields and H. Blumberg, *Compendia librorum Aristotelis qui Parva naturalia vocantur*, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge, MA 1949.

Cf. AVERROES, *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-naḥs (Epitome of De anima)*, ed. F. Al-Ahwani, Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Miṣrīyah, Cairo 1950, p. 24: «And as for the power of sensation, its nature is not the same, for the existence of colour in this power is not the same as its existence outside the soul. For its existence in its matter outside the soul is the existence of an individual subject, divided by the division of matter, whereas existence in the sensible power is not divided by any material division at all. And for this reason it is possible for it to be perfected by a very large and a very small body at one time and in one subject, like the vitreous humour, which, in its smallness, receives the [form of] the hemisphere, which arrives in this power in the same way as it receives the form of a very small body. And if it were the case that this perfection were divided through some material division, this would not be possible for it. For we find this power is perfected through contraries simultaneously, and in the same subject, and we make judgments about them—for example, the visual power, which perceives black and white together.»

This will occur not only in the case of the soul, but also in the case of the media, for it is apparent that through a single part of air the observer (*al-nāzīr*) can receive two contrary colors at the same time, [as] when one looks at two individual things (*shaskṣān*), one of which is white and the other black. Furthermore, the fact that large bodies can be perceived by vision (*li-l-baṣar*) through the pupil of the eye, despite its being small, so that it can perceive the hemisphere of the world, is proof (*dalīl*) that colors and whatever follows upon them are not conveyed to sight materially, but rather, spiritually. We say, therefore, that these senses perceive only (*innamā*) the intentions of the sensibles (*ma'ānī al-maḥsūsāt*) abstracted from the matter.<sup>44</sup>

Closely associated with the extension of spirituality to the media of sense perception in Averroes's early works is the equally surprising thesis that the universal intentions known by the intellect can only be differentiated from the particular intentions present in the senses in virtue of the media that transmit them to the perceiver. According to the *Epitomes* of both the *De anima* and *Parva naturalia* (these are both early works, only the former of which was translated into Latin) intentional existence in the soul seems to be sufficient to confer complete immateriality on the perceived object. A consequence of this claim, Averroes holds, is that all other things being equal, all intentions will be universals, and all operations of the human soul will be intellectual:

For the notion of this perfection [i.e., actual sensation] is nothing but the existence of the intention of the sensibles abstracted from their matter, but in a mode in which [the intention] possesses an individual relation to the matter by which it has become an individual intention; otherwise it would be an intellect, as we shall explain later in our discussion of the rational faculty.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> AVERROES, *Epitome of Parva naturalia*, pp. 23–24; trans. Blumberg, pp. 15–16 (modified).

<sup>45</sup> AVERROES, *Epitome of De anima*, p. 24. In the *Epitome of the Parva naturalia*, Averroes marshals this claim to provide a defence of the need for media in sense perception. On this view, the media provide an individual, material relation to the perceived objects which permits them to retain their particularity: «The soul must therefore perceive universal intentions in one manner and particulars in a different manner. As for universal intentions, it will perceive them completely dissociated from matter, and therefore, in their case, the soul will not need a medium; but as for particular intentions, it will perceive them through objects that are associated with particulars, namely, the media. If this were not the case, the intentions that could be perceived would be only universals and not particulars. ... It is therefore clear from the above discussion

At this stage in his intellectual development, then, Averroes seems to have embraced the intentionality of sense perception as forming part of a unified theory of cognition, according to which the default mode of intentional being is intellectual understanding, and that default mode is engaged whenever an object is present within a soul. This, however, seems to jeopardize the status of sense perception as a material mode of cognition capable of grasping particulars. In order to preserve the materiality of sensation, Averroes needs to find an additional mechanism to preserve the link between the soul and the material individuals that are the proper objects of the senses, and he assigns the function of providing that link to the media.<sup>46</sup>

In his *Long Commentary on the De anima*, Averroes continues to uphold the intentionality of sensation, although he abandons his earlier thesis that all intentions will be universal simply in virtue of their being in a soul, unless some particularizing feature is added to them. Indeed, it is his abandonment of this unified account of intentionality that gives rise to the aporia of the Agent Sense, which captured the imagination of many of Averroes's Latin commentators:

And someone could say that the sensibles do not move the sense in the [same] way that they exist outside the soul. For they move the sense inasmuch as they are intentions, whereas in matter they are not actually, but only potentially, intentions. And it's not possible for someone to say that this diversity happens because of a diversity of subject, in such a way that they become intentions on account of the spiritual matter which is the sense, not because of an extrinsic mover. For it would be better to think (*existimare*) that the cause of the diversity of matters is the cause of

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that the fact that these forms in the soul are spiritual particulars must be the cause that requires such perceptions to be brought into effect through a medium» (AVERROES, *Epitome of Parva naturalia*, pp. 24-26; trans. Blumberg, modified, pp. 16-17).

<sup>46</sup> I have discussed some of the problems that this view gives rise to in BLACK, *Averroes on Spirituality* cit.

the diversity of forms. And since this is the case, it is necessary to posit an extrinsic mover in the senses, other than the sensibles, as it was necessary in the intellect.<sup>47</sup>

Averroes's reaction to the aporia of the Agent Sense in this text is puzzling, since his revised position on the material intellect has now rendered his earlier need to differentiate sensation from intellection moot. Now that the material intellect is understood as entirely separate from the individual soul, Averroes could easily have held that reception into an intellect was sufficient to produce universal intentions or intelligibles, whereas reception into a soul united to a body would produce particular intentions, i.e., sensibles and images. Such an interpretation of the implications of the unicity of the intellect would have avoided the aporia entirely, but Averroes now regards appeals to the nature of the recipient to explain intentionality as violations of the ontological and explanatory priority of form over matter within an Aristotelian framework. While Averroes may have been generally correct in his observations regarding the implications of Aristotelian hylomorphism, it's not obvious he was correct in applying strict hylomorphism to this case. After all, soul and intellect are matter only in an analogous sense, i.e., insofar as they are subjects for cognitive change. The ontological status of soul and intellect is more akin to that of form than to that of matter, at least in the sense that is relevant to the principles that Averroes invokes in the aporia. So it remains somewhat of a mystery why Averroes did not avail himself of the equivocality of form and matter within an intentional framework to resolve the problem he had created for both Aristotle and himself.

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<sup>47</sup>AVERROES, *Commentarium magnum*, Bk. 2, comm. 60, p. 221.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Despite the differences in the details of their accounts of intentionality, Avicenna and Averroes share a commitment to the core theses of the object-directedness and mental existence of intentions. Both philosophers also share a common though often implicit assumption that abstractness is a necessary condition for intentionality to be present: the intentional existence of objects is always marked by some increase in their immateriality, however that dematerialization is produced. Indeed, it seems that it is to their different understandings of the degree of immateriality exemplified in various types of cognition that we should look to explain the stark differences between Avicenna and Averroes on the scope of intentionality within the realm of sensation. For Avicenna sensation remains thoroughly physical, with the sole exception of the operations of the estimative faculty, and for that reason intentionality reaches down no further than estimation. For Averroes, sensation displays immateriality and spirituality even in the most fundamental operations of the external senses. For him, in contrast to Avicenna, intentionality must be extended not only to the sense powers of the perceiver, but even the external media that enable the sense objects to affect them cognitively.

Thus, while intentionality remains an intrinsic part of the theory of cognition for Averroes, its principal function is to explain the constitution of cognitive objects. The consequences of such a shift in the concept of intentionality are not negligible, since they entail the severing of any ties between intentionality and consciousness. Though many of Averroes's readers in the Latin West were quite happy to adopt his view of intentionality insofar as it applies to sensation, it remains an open question whether they were fully aware what bill of goods they'd been sold. For without the ability to appeal to personal

consciousness and awareness of thinking as essential constituents of any intentional cognitive process, Averroes's Latin critics have lost their most compelling philosophical grounds for declaring that the unicity of the intellect is impossible and absurd.