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**Models of the Mind:
Metaphysical Presuppositions of the Averroist
and Thomistic Accounts of Intellection¹**

1. THE EXPLANATORY FUNCTION OF THE INTELLECT IN AVERROES AND AQUINAS

It is hard to deny that even for those sympathetic to his philosophical project, Averroes's mature position on the separateness and unicity of the material intellect appears counter-intuitive, whatever its value as an interpretation of Aristotle's *De anima*². Nor is the source of this counter-intuitive appearance hard to pinpoint after centuries of attacks against Averroes's philosophy of mind by Western philosophers, the most well known of whom remains Thomas Aquinas³. It is Averroes's apparent neglect of the

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy at the Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association on December 29, 2000.

² The unicity of the intellect is the position, upheld by Averroes and a number of his sympathizers in the medieval Latin tradition, that the possible or material intellect discussed by Aristotle in *De anima* III, 4, as well as the agent intellect of *De anima* III, 5, is a single immaterial or separate substance shared in some way by all individual humans. This position is characteristic of Averroes's mature philosophical psychology as expressed in his *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, which survives only in Latin translation. For the critical edition see *Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, ed. F. S. CRAWFORD, The Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge (Mass.) 1953. In his earlier psychological writings, in particular the *Epitome of « De anima »*, Averroes did not yet uphold the unicity thesis, although he later corrected this work to bring it into line with his mature position. See *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-nafs*, ed. A. F. AL-AHWANI, Cairo 1950. Averroes's *Middle Commentary on « De anima »* takes a position that is closest to the *Long Commentary*, although its exact place in the evolution of Averroes's psychology remains in dispute (see n. 26 below). For this text see *Averroës : Middle Commentary on Aristotle's « De anima »*, ed. and trans. A. IVRY, Provo, Utah 2002.

³ I have used the following abbreviations for Aquinas's works : *DUI* : *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas* ; *SCG* : *Summa contra gentiles* ; *ST* : *Summa theologiae*. All citations of the works of Aquinas are from the Leonine edition, with the following exceptions : For the *ST* I have used the 5 volume Ottawa edition (Ottawa 1953) ; for the commentaries on Aristotle's *De anima* and *De sensu et sensato*, I have included references to both the Leonine edition and to the paragraph numbers of the Marietti editions ; and for the *De unitate intellectus* I have also included references to the section numbers of the edition of L. W. KEELER, Rome 1936, as well as to the page numbers of the Leonine edition. Throughout this article, unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Latin and Arabic texts are my own.

obvious difficulties that the doctrine of a single intellect would seem to pose for anyone seeking to explain how individual human beings can be said to be the *understanding subjects* who are aware of universal intelligibles. By positing a single intellectual principle for all human knowers, Averroes seems to have placed conscious thought itself outside the individual.

Here, however, it is not my intention to argue that Averroes can account for the individual's *consciousness* of her thoughts, since I have attempted to make that case elsewhere⁴. My concern is instead to explore the underlying presupposition of the standard Thomistic critiques of Averroist psychology, namely, that Averroes's material intellect is intended to function as a *subject*, in the sense of a *knower*, of intelligible thoughts. I will argue that a careful reading of Averroes's discussions not only of the material intellect, but also of the faculties of sensory cognition, indicate that he simply did not think that the primary *explanandum* of cognitive psychology is the individual human subject's conscious awareness of the apprehended object. Rather, taking as axiomatic Aristotle's description of cognition as « the reception of the form without the matter »⁵, Averroes's primary concern is to explain the kind of abstraction that differentiates one level of cognition from another. In the case of intellect in particular, the conditions under which universals could be realized as intelligible objects was especially urgent in the face of Aristotle's rejection of Platonism. Against this background, the material intellect must be posited in order to account for the actualization of universal intelligibles as *objects* of thought ; it is a subject of thinking primarily in the sense that it acts, as Aristotle says, as a « place » of forms wherein the intelligible becomes an actual universal⁶.

In what follows I will focus on a number of features of Averroes's cognitive psychology that indicate how radically different are the presuppositions of his noetic theory from those of Aquinas. These features pertain not only to Averroes's account of the function of the material intellect in the central portions of his *Long Commentary on « De anima »* III, 4, but also to his account of sensation as a form of « spiritual » (*rūḥānī*) alteration. Through these investigations I hope to illustrate that Averroes's entire doctrine of understanding is focused on the status of the intelligible as an object, and that any apparent concerns with the question of subjective awareness of intelligibles dissipate when viewed in the larger context of Averroes's cognitive psychology.

⁴ See D. L. BLACK, *Consciousness and Self-Knowledge in Aquinas's Critique of Averroes's Psychology*, « Journal of the History of Philosophy », 31, 1993, pp. 23-59.

⁵ ARISTOTLE, *De anima* II, 12, 424a18-19 : ἡ μὲν αἴσθησις ἐστι τὸ δεκτικὸν τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰδῶν ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης.

⁶ *Ibid.*, III, 4, 429a27-28 : τόπον εἰδῶν.

In the case of Averroes's account of the material intellect itself, I will draw special attention to one of its most striking features, namely, his repeated comparison of the material intellect's role, not to that of the *eye* in vision, but rather to that of the transparent *medium*. And I will show that Averroes's use of the analogy between the material intellect and the medium is consistent with, and perhaps even demanded by, his general understanding of the role of media in sensation. Before I turn to Averroes, however, it may be helpful to examine somewhat more closely the presuppositions that underlie Aquinas's criticisms of Averroes's interpretation of the theory of the intellect presented in the *De anima*.

2. PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE THOMISTIC CRITIQUE

The vast majority of Aquinas's many criticisms of the Averroist theory of the intellect rest on the supposition that a single material intellect, however it is related to individual human beings, will in the end be the sole and principal knower of all the intelligibles that are received into it, and hence the only entity that can legitimately be said to understand those intelligibles. This is captured in Aquinas's most famous anti-Averroist refrain, namely, his declaration that Averroes is unable to account for the simple, commonsense fact that « *This [individual] human understands* » (*Hic homo [singularis] intelligit*)⁷. The issue that Aquinas attempts to address with this formula is one that is akin in some important ways to what more recent philosophers have called the *homunculus* fallacy, in which miniature human agents, *homunculi*, are unwittingly assumed to exist *within* the individual, performing her various mental operations. In a similar fashion, the Averroist material intellect commits what might be termed an inverted *homunculus* fallacy, whereby a superhuman agent *outside* the individual is posited in order to explain how the individual is able to reason and understand. Interpreted along these lines, Averroes appears to make individual humans into minions who provide the raw material of cognition to the material intellect. The basic mistake that is supposed to inflict both the traditional and the Averroist *homunculus* fallacies is the same. On both scenarios the mental operations of the human mind are explained by appealing to the existence some *other* mind or minds inside or outside the individual, and as a result they remain mysterious. For we can always ask for a further explanation of how the *homunculus* or the material intellect, as the case may be, is able to understand and thereby to make us understand through it.

⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *STI*, q. 76, a. 1 ; *Sentencia libri De anima*, III, c. 1, p. 205b282 (lect. 7, n. 690) ; *DUI* c. 3, p. 303, ll. 27-28 (§62) ; p. 303, ll. 60, 96 (§63) ; p. 304, ll. 117-118 (§§65, 66).

One does not have to look far in Aquinas's anti-Averroist writings, in particular the most virulent ones found in the *Summa contra gentiles* and the *De unitate intellectus*, in order to find statements to the effect that Averroes's material intellect, and not the individual human, must be the true locus of intelligent activity, and hence that the positing of such a separate intellect explains nothing :

- « For the one who has intellect is the one who understands »⁸.
- « For it is clear that this individual human understands ; for unless *we* understood, *we* would never ask about the intellect »⁹.
- « Likewise understanding will not be the act of Socrates, but only [the act] of the intellect *using* the body of Socrates »¹⁰.
- « But if someone should say that the individual human is intellect itself, it follows that this individual human would not be different from that individual human, and that all humans would be one human, not indeed by participation in the species, but in the sense that there would be only one individual »¹¹.

The picture painted in these passages is a stark and alarming caricature : according to Averroism, we are not individual agents or knowers with control over our own thoughts and the desires arising from them ; instead, we are the helpless slaves of the material intellect, an alien being who controls our thoughts and thereby robs us of our freedom.

⁸ AQUINAS, *SCG* II, c. 59 : « habens enim intellectum est intelligens ».

⁹ AQUINAS, *DUI* c. 3, p. 303, ll. 27-29 (§62) : « Manifestum est enim quod hic homo singularis intelligit : numquam enim de intellectu quereremus nisi intelligeremus » (emphasis added).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 3, p. 304, ll. 158-60 (§69) : « et similiter intelligere non erit actus Sortis : sed intellectus tantum utentis corpore Sortis » (emphasis added).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, c. 4, p. 307, ll. 27-32 (§87) : « Si quis autem dicat quod homo singularis est ipse intellectus, consequens est quod hic homo singularis non sit alius ab illo homine singulari, et quod omnes homines sint unus homo, non quidem participatione speciei, sed secundum unum indiuiduum » ; English translation by B. ZEDLER, *On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists*, Milwaukee 1968, p. 59 (slightly modified). Aquinas holds that the Latin Averroist development of the unicity thesis, which attempts to envisage the separate intellect as a *mover* of the individual, exacerbates this difficulty : « Sic igitur patet quod intellectus non unitur Sorti solum ut motor ; et quod, etiam si hoc esset, nihil proficeret ad hoc quod Sortes intelligeret. Qui ergo hanc positionem defendere uolunt, aut confiteantur se nichil intelligere et indignos esse cum quibus aliqui disputent » (*DUI* c. 3, p. 306, ll. 312-317 [§79]). Aquinas appears to recognize that the mover-moved model is not explicitly employed by Averroes himself, although he assumes that the Latin Averroists were driven to this alternative view by the intrinsic difficulties in Averroes's own position. While Averroes does occasionally use the language of mover and moved in his exposition of *De anima* III, 4, it is not usually the intellect that is the mover of the individual, but rather, the images are described as the movers of the material intellect. See, for example, *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 4, p. 400, ll. 395-399 ; pp. 405, l. 544 - 406, l. 548.

While passages such as these offer colourful illustrations of Aquinas's unease with the Averroist noetic, Aquinas' most striking anti-Averroist arguments occur in chapter 4 of his *De unitate intellectus*, where he develops a refutation of Averroism based upon the claim that it represents a model of thinking in which one principal *agent*, the material intellect, functions like a single *eye* through which many human beings are supposed to see¹² :

« But let us grant that Socrates would understand by reason of the fact that the intellect understands, although the intellect be only a mover, as man sees by reason of the fact that his eye sees. And to follow out the comparison, let it be held that for all humans there is an eye that is numerically one ; it remains to be asked whether all humans would be one who sees or many who see »¹³.

I will leave aside for the moment the fact that Averroes himself does not liken the material intellect to the eye, a point which I will take up in subsequent sections; here I will focus instead on the model that Aquinas himself has constructed. Perhaps its most curious feature is that the shared eye posited by Aquinas as common to all human seers is assumed to function as a single « principal *agent* », and not as a single *instrument* being employed simultaneously by a multiplicity of agents. Aquinas seems blind to the obvious objection that the eye is itself a bodily *organ* or instrument employed by the soul's visual power, rather than the subject which does the seeing, even though he himself naturally lapses into instrumental language to describe the eye's function and that of the other organs of the body.

The reason for this oversight becomes clear if one examines further the main thrust of Aquinas's argument utilizing the eye analogy. Its fundamental claim is that while it is possible that many agents using a single instrument might still be able to perform diverse operations and hence retain their individual autonomy, this autonomy will vanish when the situation is the reverse, with a single agent employing many instruments. So Averroism will

¹² Aquinas introduces this illustration as a specific refutation of the alternative Latin Averroist model of the material intellect as united to the individual « non ut forma sed sicut motor » (*DUI* c. 4, p. 308, ll. 44-45 (§87)). But he in turn identifies the mover as a « principal agent » and his critique is clearly intended to apply to all variations on the basic Averroist position, including Averroes's original thesis.

¹³ AQUINAS, *DUI* c. 4, p. 308, ll. 48-54 (§88 ; trans. ZEDLER cit., p. 60, slightly modified) : « Sed demus quod Sortes intelligat per hoc quod intellectus intelligit, licet intellectus sit solum motor, sicut homo uidet per hoc quod oculus uidet ; et ut similitudinem sequamur, ponatur quod omnium hominum sit unus oculus numero : inquirendum restat utrum omnes homines sint unus uidens uel multi uidentes ».

be vulnerable to attack only if it is understood to involve a single principal agent using a multiplicity of tools to perform *its* operations :

« To investigate the truth of this, we must consider that the question about the first mover is one thing, and that about the instrument, another. For if many people use numerically one and the same instrument there are said to be many operators ; for example, when many use one machine to throw or lift a stone. But if the principal agent be one, using many things for instruments, nevertheless the operator is one, but perhaps the operations are diverse because of the diverse instruments. But sometimes even the operation is one, although many instruments are required for it. Thus, therefore, the unity of the one operating is viewed not according to the instruments, but according to the principal agent using the instruments.

Therefore, in the aforesaid position, if the eye were the principal agent in humans, which would use all the powers of the soul and parts of the body as instruments, the many having one eye would be one who sees. But if the eye be not the principal agent in a human, but something which uses the eye would be more primary than it, and this would be diverse in diverse humans, then there would indeed be many seeing but by one eye.

Now it is clear that the intellect is that which is the principal agent in a human, and that it uses all the powers of the soul and the members of the body as if they were organs. [...] If, therefore, there is one intellect for all, it follows of necessity that there will be one who understands and consequently one who wills and one who uses according to the choice of his will all those things by which humans are diverse from one another »¹⁴.

In working out this elaborate paradigm, then, Aquinas does take care to qualify his claims in such a way as to take account of the objection that the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, c. 4, p. 308, ll. 54-79, 81-85 (§§88-89 ; trans. ZEDLER cit., p. 60, slightly modified) : « Ad cuius ueritatis inquisitionem considerare oportet quod aliter se habet de primo mouente, et aliter de instrumento. Si enim multi homines utantur uno et eodem instrumento numero, dicentur multi operantes : puta, cum multi utuntur una machina ad lapidis projectionem uel eleuationem. Si uero principale agens sit unum quod utatur multis ut instrumentis, nichilominus operans est unum, sed forte operationes diuerse propter diuersa instrumenta ; aliquando autem et operatio una, etsi ad eam multa instrumenta requirantur. Sic igitur unitas operantis attenditur non secundum instrumenta, sed secundum principale quod utitur instrumentis. Predicata ergo positione facta, si oculus esset principale in homine, qui uteretur omnibus potentiis anime et partibus corporis quasi instrumentis, multi habentes unum oculum essent unus uidens ; si uero oculus non sit principale hominis, sed aliquid sit eo principalius quod utitur oculo, quod diuersificaretur in diuersis, essent quidem multi uidentes sed uno oculo. Manifestum est autem quod intellectus est id quod est principale in homine, et quod utitur omnibus potentiis anime et membris corporis tamquam organis [...]. Si igitur sit unus intellectus omnium, ex necessitate sequitur quod sit unus intelligens, et per consequens unus uolens et unus utens pro sue uoluntatis arbitrio omnibus illis secundum que homines diuersificantur ad inuicem ». Another version of this argument occurs in *ST I*, q. 76, a. 2.

eye itself is not, in the case of vision, truly the principal agent but only an instrument. Nonetheless, if the Averroist takes seriously the instrumental language used by Aristotle to describe *all* of the soul's faculties, including the intellect — « the part of the soul *with* which the soul knows and thinks »¹⁵ — Aquinas's analogies will be inappropriate. Indeed, Aquinas has himself introduced an alternative model in the foregoing passage that captures exactly the Averroist intellect's relation to the individual — « if many people use numerically one and the same instrument there are said to be many operators ; for example, when many use one machine to throw or lift a stone ». On this scenario, which Aquinas implies would be an acceptable one, the material intellect plays the role of a shared instrument which individuals, as separate and autonomous agents, utilize to perform their higher cognitive operations.

On some level, moreover, Aquinas himself recognizes the significance of the instrumental language that is employed by both Aristotle and Averroes to describe the intellect's relation to individual human souls. In just the next paragraph of the *De unitate intellectus*, Aquinas uses this very sort of instrumental language to launch another criticism of the unicity thesis :

« Furthermore, if all humans understand *by one intellect*, howsoever it be united to them, whether it be as a form or as a mover, it follows of necessity that at one time and with respect to one intelligible there be numerically one act of understanding for all humans »¹⁶.

Yet Aquinas sees no significance to the shift in expression, and he simply returns to the model of the intellect as a mover. Nonetheless the use of instrumental language here is deliberate, since the objection that follows evokes the role played by intelligible species in cognition. Aquinas, as is well known, identifies intelligible species as universal likenesses, abstracted from sense images or phantasms, *by which (quo)* the intellect is able to know extramental realities. Aquinas's main point in describing the function of the species instrumentally is to refute the view that we do not know the actual things that exist outside our minds, but only the contents of our own

¹⁵ ARISTOTLE, *De anima* III, 4, 429a10-11 : ὃ γινώσκει τε ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ φρονεῖ. Cf. I, 4, 408b11-15, which contains Aristotle's oft-cited remark that « it is doubtless better to avoid saying that the soul pities or learns or thinks, and rather to say that it is the human being who does this with his soul » (ἀλλὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον τῇ ψυχῇ; trans. J. A. SMITH, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. BARNES, 2 vols., Princeton 1984, vol. II, p. 651, slightly modified). See also *De anima* II, 2, 414a4-8.

¹⁶ *DUI* c. 4, p. 308, ll. 96-101, emphasis added : « Adhuc, si omnes homines intelligunt uno intellectu, qualitercumque eis uniat, siue ut forma siue motor, de necessitate sequitur quod omnium hominum sit unum numero ipsum intelligere quod est simul et respectu unius intelligibilis » (§90, trans. ZEDLER cit., p. 61, slightly modified).

thoughts¹⁷. Hence Aquinas's objection to Averroes here is that if all human beings share the same material intellect, then whenever two of us understand the same thing, for example, a stone, « there will have to be one and the same intellectual operation in me and in you » because both of our acts of understanding will be determined by one and the same intelligible species within the separate material intellect :

« Because for the same active principle, regardless of whether it be form or mover, and with respect to the same object, the operation of the same species at the same time can only be one in number »¹⁸.

Yet such an objection is clearly circular : only if we have *already* presupposed that every knower has her own intellectual power containing its own personalized set of intelligible species would the picture that Aquinas has just painted vitiate the reality of individuals possessing their own intellectual thoughts. Indeed, the very problem that requires the characterization of intelligible species as instruments arises in the first place only on the assumption that such species are qualities or affections (*passiones*) of individual human minds¹⁹. Once we dispense with that assumption, moreover, we can find in Aquinas's own depiction of multiple principal agents sharing a single instrument a model that makes good sense of the Averroist paradigm within the framework of intelligible species. On that model we could all use the intelligible species located in a separate intellect as *instruments* for our individual cognitive operations, yet those operations would remain individuated in virtue of the individuation of their principal agents, that is, individual human beings. Multiple knowers would *use* the same species simultaneously in their own activities in much the same way that many individuals can view the same movie or listen to the same musical performance

¹⁷ The *locus classicus* for Aquinas's views on the instrumental function of the *species intelligibiles* is *STI*, q. 85, a. 2 : « Respondeo. Dicendum quod quidam posuerunt quod vires quae sunt in nobis cognoscitivae, nihil cognoscunt nisi proprias passiones, puta quod sensus non sentit nisi passionem sui organi. Et secundum hoc intellectus nihil intelligit nisi suam passionem scilicet speciem intelligibilem in se receptam. Sed haec opinio manifeste apparet falsa [...] ».

¹⁸ AQUINAS, *DUIc.* 4, p. 308, ll. 103-107 : « Non enim potest esse eiusdem actui principii, siue sit forma siue sit motor, respectu eiusdem obiecti nisi una numero operatio eiusdem speciei in eodem tempore » (§90, trans. ZEDLER cit., p. 61).

¹⁹ The appeal to intelligible species as cognitive mechanisms is unique to the medieval Latin tradition and entirely absent from Islamic authors, including both Averroes and Avicenna. For an excellent discussion of the implications of Aquinas's appeal to intelligible species in his critiques of Averroes, see B. C. BAZAN, « *Intellectum Speculativum* » : Averroes, Thomas Aquinas, and Siger of Brabant on the Intelligible Object, « *Journal of the History of Philosophy* », 19, 1981, pp. 425-446.

together without negating the individual character of their experiences. All this is compatible with Aquinas's own understanding of the instrumental function of intelligible species and with his admission that a sharing of instruments amongst discrete agents in no way threatens the individuality of the operations which they perform using those tools.

There is one final model of how a separate intellect might be conceived that Aquinas considers plausible, namely, the traditional model of the agent intellect common to most of the Greek and Arabic commentators on Aristotle. While Aquinas does not, of course, accept the *truth* of the theory of the unicity of the agent intellect, nonetheless he is emphatic that it does not produce the same pernicious consequences for the individuality of thoughts and volitions as does the parallel Averroist doctrine pertaining to the material intellect²⁰. The opening passages of chapter 4 of the *De unitate intellectus* contain one of Aquinas's clearest and most sympathetic explanations of why it might seem plausible to posit a single agent intellect :

« For no difficulty seems to follow, if many things are perfected by one agent, just as by one sun all the visual potencies of animals are perfected for seeing. Yet even this would not be the meaning of Aristotle, who held that the agent intellect is something in the soul, and for this reason he compared it to light. But Plato, holding that there is one separate intellect, compares it to the sun, as Themistius says. For there is but one sun, but many lights diffused by the sun for seeing »²¹.

There are two points that are of significance for Aquinas's assumptions about the Averroist model of the material intellect once we grant that a separate agent intellect is at least feasible. First, one notes immediately an equivocation on the notion of *agency* in this passage that parallels the vagueness in Aquinas's remarks on *instruments* in his critique of the intellect-as-mover paradigm. Just as Aquinas employs instrumental language to describe the function of the material intellect while criticizing a model that he claims makes the material intellect the principal *agent* which understands, here he explicitly endorses the possibility of a single *agent* perfecting the cognitive

²⁰ Aquinas does, of course, argue against the separateness and unicity of the agent intellect in texts such as *SCG* II, cc. 76-78 and *ST* I, q. 79, aa. 4-5, although his attacks on this position are not nearly so virulent as his attacks on Averroism.

²¹ AQUINAS, *DUI*c. 4, p. 307, ll. 9-12 : « nichil enim uidetur inconueniens sequi, si ab uno agente multa perficiantur, quemadmodum ab uno sole perficiuntur omnes potentie uisive animalium ad uidendum. Quamuis etiam hoc non sit secundum intentionem Aristotilis, qui posuit intellectum agentem esse aliquid in anima, unde comparauit ipsum lumini ; Plato autem ponens intellectum unum separatum, comparauit ipsum soli, ut Themistius dicit : est enim unus sol, sed plura lumina diffusa a sole ad uidendum » (§86, trans. ZEDLER cit., p. 59). Aquinas is similarly sympathetic to the reasonableness of this position in the *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, q. 5.

capacities of many individuals, whether those powers be visual or intellectual. It is not, then, agency versus instrumentality that is at issue in either case, since it appears that under some circumstances neither a single agent nor a single instrument is sufficient to threaten the proprietary character of the resultant operation for the multiple individuals in whom it is actualized. Rather, in the case of both the agent and the material intellects, the problem arises precisely because of the sorts of operations that are being explained. In the case of the material intellect, it is assumed that the operation for which it accounts just is the conscious possession of thoughts by a knowing subject. Aquinas presupposes that the Averroist material intellect is another individual mind like yours or mine, and that it thinks in exactly the same sense that we do. The agent intellect, by contrast, is not viewed as a thinker in the standard sense, but instead, as an abstractive or illuminative principle which allows thought to take place in the individual. The problem, of course, is that (as Averroes likes to point out) the descriptions that Aristotle gives of both the agent and material intellects are exactly parallel, and cognitive language is applied indifferently to both these principles, that is, Aristotle speaks of them both as « thinking »²². So if there is an alternative model for the function of the material intellect that is neutral with respect to individual human thought in the same way that Aquinas concedes the model of the agent intellect as a common light or sun is neutral, Averroism will not be open to the kinds of objections to which Aquinas believes it falls prey.

This point brings me to the second feature of Aquinas's assessment of the neutrality of the theory of a separate agent intellect. In the passage cited above, Aquinas argues that both the sun and the light metaphors for the agent intellect — which he assigns respectively to the « Platonic » and Aristotelian traditions — successfully avoid the difficulties that plague the Averroist doctrine of unicity. But what is it about these metaphors that makes them, in varying degrees, acceptable? Clearly it is the fact that, unlike the shared eye that Aquinas uses to illustrate his understanding of the Averroist material intellect, both the sun and its light are impersonal natural forces that facilitate vision for animals with the capacity to see. Neither functions as a seer or a cognizer, nor even as the proprietary organ of vision within the sensing animal. So the metaphor is all-important here, and it is meant to do much of the explanatory and rhetorical work for Aquinas: it drives home quite vividly how Aquinas sees the difference between the respective roles of the material and agent intellects in cognition.

²² For Averroes's remarks on the similarity between Aristotle's descriptions of these two faculties, see *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 19, p. 440, ll. 28-35 (on *De anima* III, 5, 430a17-20).

Unfortunately for Aquinas, however, in the *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Averroes himself never draws any comparison between the *eye* and the material intellect that would justify Aquinas's presumption²³. In fact, as I noted above, the principal analogy between vision and intellection employed by Averroes takes the material intellect to be the counterpart to the *transparent medium*. Now Aquinas himself argues in the above passage that the Aristotelian comparison of the agent intellect to *light* can be taken to support the *individuation* of the agent intellect, since there is a sense in which « many lights » are « diffused » by one sun. So if we take seriously Averroes's comparison of the material intellect to the medium, there is some sense in which the Averroist paradigm might even count as a model of individuation, at least inasmuch as the medium is what permits the diffusion of the light which is described as its *actuality*²⁴. In any event, if the material intellect is akin to the medium, then no greater difficulty should arise if it is one for all human knowers than in the case of the agent intellect. For if there is no objection to multiple seers being illumined by the light of one sun, it is hard to see what the objection can be to that light traveling to those same seers through the same expanse of air.

3. AVERROES'S CHANGING MODELS OF INTELLECTION

It should be clear from the preceding section that a fundamental if tacit assumption of Aquinas's critique of Averroism is that a separate material intellect common to all human knowers would have to be an *individual* and a *substance* in exactly the same sense that embodied human beings are individuals and substances. By the same token Aquinas also assumes that the only real alternative to the separate material intellect is a material intellect that functions as a distinct faculty *within* a subsistent, individual human soul that is nonetheless the form of a physical body. But this is an alternative model that was never seriously entertained by Averroes himself, despite the fact that Averroes toyed with many different accounts of the material intellect throughout his career²⁵.

²³ Indeed, even in earlier works specific analogies between the organs of sensation and the material intellect are rare. The one exception that I have discovered occurs in the *Middle Commentary on « De anima »*, which likens the material intellect to the transparency of the pupil of the eye (*al-hadaqah*), rather than that of the medium (*Averroës' Middle Commentary*, §296, p. 116, ll. 4-9).

²⁴ ARISTOTLE, *De anima* II, 7, 418b9-10: φῶς δέ ἐστιν ἡ τούτου ἐνέργεια, τοῦ διαφανοῦς ἡ διαφανές.

²⁵ This does not reflect upon the consistency of Aquinas's own criticisms, however, since Aquinas had no knowledge of Averroes's earlier commentaries on the *De anima*. In *SCG* II, c. 62 and II, c. 67, Aquinas offers counter-arguments to the positions of Alexander and Avempace,

While Averroes's medieval Christian readers were unaware of this fact, it is now well known amongst contemporary scholars that Averroes's views on the nature of the material intellect underwent a number of developments over the course of his life²⁶. In the original redaction of his *Epitome of «De anima»*, written early in his philosophical career, Averroes upheld a broadly «materialist» view of the intellect close to that of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Ibn Bājjah (Avempace), according to which the material intellect was not a separate substance at all, but rather, «the disposition in the imaginative forms for receiving the intelligibles»²⁷. Of course, in this early text Averroes is already fully committed to Aristotelian principles, and he accepts as fundamental Aristotle's arguments that the potential or material intellect must be separate from and unmixed with matter if it is to explain the capacity of human beings to acquire knowledge of all material forms, that is, of all the universal intelligibles that pertain to the physical world²⁸. But at this stage in his thinking, Averroes believes that by locating the intellect as an emergent disposition within the individual's imaginative forms he is in full conformity with the requirements

which are known to him from Averroes's *Long Commentary on «De anima»*. But Aquinas would have had no reason to believe that these were viable alternative theories for Averroes himself, since the attitude that Averroes takes to these positions in the *Long Commentary* is a highly critical one, reflecting Averroes's belief that he was misled by Alexander and Ibn Bājjah in his earlier years.

²⁶ There remains some controversy over the exact chronological ordering of Averroes's psychological writings, in particular the place of his *Middle Commentary on «De anima»* in the developmental story. Nonetheless Averroes scholars are unanimous that the *Epitome of «De anima»* in its original version represents Averroes's earliest views on the soul, and that the *Long Commentary*, together with the revised versions of the *Epitome* and the *Middle Commentary*, represent his final position on the status of the material intellect taken in itself. (The controversy over the *Middle Commentary* pertains to the material intellect's relation to the agent intellect). For an account of evolution of Averroes's views, see H. DAVIDSON, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992, pp. 258-314. For the competing views on the chronological relation between Averroes's *Long* and *Middle Commentary*, see H. DAVIDSON, *The Relation between Averroes' Middle and Long Commentaries on the «De anima»*, «Arabic Sciences and Philosophy» 7, 1997, pp. 139-151, and A. IVRY, *Averroes' Three Commentaries on «De anima»*, in *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition*, eds. J. A. AERTSEN and G. ENDRESS, Brill, Leiden 1999, pp. 199-216.

²⁷ AVERROES, *Epitome of «De anima»*, p. 86. Strictly speaking, of course, neither the early Averroes, nor either Alexander or Ibn Bājjah, are materialists in either the contemporary or the ancient and medieval sense. Their positions are probably closest to what we now call «epiphenomenalism», although the fit is not exact, since they do not cast their account of the nature of the intellect in terms of soul-body interaction. So none of these philosophers would uphold the claim that the causality between physical and mental events is one-way, nor would they therefore feel impelled to deny that the mind can exercise a causal influence over the body.

²⁸ ARISTOTLE, *De anima* III, 4, 429a18-429b5. For an overview of Averroes's views in the *Epitome of «De anima»*, see DAVIDSON, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes*, pp. 265-272, and A. IVRY, *Averroes' «Short Commentary» on Aristotle's «De anima»*, «Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale», 8, 1997, pp. 511-552.

of the Aristotelian theory. For although the imagination is a faculty of the soul which uses a corporeal organ — that is, the brain — insofar as imagination is a perceptual faculty, the images it contains have spiritual or intentional rather than physical being, and so the intellectual power that emerges from them is not « material in the way that corporeal forms are material »²⁹.

One of the reasons Averroes gives for upholding this view of the material intellect in the *Epitome* is that it allows him to circumvent the problems identified by Aristotle in his rejection of the Platonic theory of ideas. It is only because intelligibles are by their very nature correlated with the images that each individual knower has stored within her imaginative faculty that one person can be said to possess intelligibles that are numerically distinct from those of all other people :

« The intelligible of 'human being' in me, for example, is different from its intelligible in Aristotle, for its intelligible in me depends only on individual images that are different from the individuals upon whose images its intelligible depends in Aristotle »³⁰.

My intelligibles are individuated as *mine* through their origin in and relation to the images of those particular instances of humanity that I have personally observed and experienced. And since my intellectual power itself is nothing but a higher order refinement of those very images, there is no opening left for Platonism at all — universals remain entirely anchored within the imaginative faculties of individuals, and thereby firmly connected to particulars in the external world :

« And it would only be possible for these universals not to depend upon their subjects if it were the case that [the universals] were existent outside the soul, as Plato thought. And it is evident that these universals do not have existence outside the soul, as we have said, and that what is existent outside the soul includes only their individuals alone »³¹.

How is Averroes's early account of the material intellect as a disposition within the imaginative faculty relevant to a correct understanding of the very different model of intellection represented in his mature doctrine on the unicity of the intellect ? When one considers closely the alternative candidates that Averroes proposes in the *Epitome of «De anima»* for the role of the subject of the material intellect, it is striking that he does not include among

²⁹ AVERROES, *Epitome of «De anima»*, p. 86.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

them any perceptual *faculty* of the soul that might explain the individual's status as a conscious subject of thought. According to Averroes, the only three categories of actual beings under which the material intellect could fall are those of body, soul, and intellect, « intellect » here indicating a pure intellect completely separate from matter³². In contrast to his later position in the *Long Commentary*, in this text Averroes rejects the possibility that the human capacity for thought could reside in a purely separate intellect. Since a separate intellect is not admixed with potency, Averroes argues, it is not susceptible to the generation and corruptibility characteristic of human understanding as manifested in our need to acquire intelligibles through gradual learning and empirical observation. Averroes also rejects a purely materialist or corporeal account of the intellect, since that would violate Aristotle's principle that the subject which receives *all* material intelligibles cannot itself be mixed with matter, for that would impede or limit the range of its cognitive capacity. The only option, then, is that the intellect resides in some way in a *soul*³³.

Having concluded that the intellect must in some way reside within the human soul, one might expect that Averroes would identify it as some sort of perceptual or cognitive faculty, either a new faculty distinct from and independent of the lower faculties, or an aspect of one of the higher internal sense faculties such as imagination or cogitation³⁴. Certainly if Averroes were concerned at all to explain the intellect's status as a knowing subject and a seat of conscious awareness, one would have expected him to identify it as a higher order disposition within the faculty of imagination itself. But even

³² AVERROES, *Epitome of « De anima »*, pp. 84-85 : « And if it is something in actuality, then it is necessarily either a body, a soul, or an intellect, since as we shall show later there is no fourth type of existence here ».

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 86 : « So let us return to where we were. And we say that since it has been shown that these intelligibles are generated, therefore it is necessary that a disposition precede them. And since a disposition is something which is not separate, it follows that it is found in a subject. And it is not possible that this subject be a body, inasmuch as it has been shown that these intelligibles are not material in the way that corporeal forms are material. And it is also not possible that it be an intellect, since what is in potency is some thing, which does not have in itself anything in actuality of that for which it is a potency. And since this is the case, the subject for this disposition is necessarily a soul ».

³⁴ Averroes does not treat the cogitative faculty as a distinct internal sense power in the *Epitome of « De anima »*, although there are scattered references to the activity of « cogitation » (*al-fikr*) throughout the text (e.g., pp. 71, 96, 98). In general the concept of internal senses is absent from this work, and only the generic category of « imagination » (*al-takhayyul*) is singled out for detailed discussion. Aquinas sometimes accuses the Averroes of the *Long Commentary* of reducing the individual human mind to the cogitative faculty, but this is something that Averroes himself denies vigorously. See *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 6, pp. 415, l. 44 - 416, l. 89. For the Thomistic charges, see *SCG II*, c. 60.

here, Averroes opts for a solution that shows his concern is primarily with establishing a substratum for the intelligible as a distinct sort of cognitive *object*. Hence, the place within which he locates the individual's capacity to receive universal forms is, as we have already noted, not the imagination itself, but rather, its intentional *contents*, the imaginative forms :

« And there is nothing closer to being a subject for these intelligibles which is here evident among the powers of the soul other than the imaginative forms, since it has been shown that [the intelligibles] are only found conjoined to them, and that they exist through their existence and are destroyed through their destruction. Therefore, the disposition which is in the imaginative forms for receiving the intelligibles is the first material intellect »³⁵.

The foregoing comparison between Averroes's early and later theories of the material intellect offers a dramatic illustration of the fact that Averroes never entertained the idea that the material intellect was meant to explain the individual's *awareness* of universal intelligibles. Even when located within the human soul itself, the material intellect served only to provide the ontological underpinnings for the *existence* of universal, abstract forms. So Averroes's neglect of the issue of individual consciousness is not an embarrassing by-product of the doctrine of unicity itself, but rather, the reflection of a radically different conception of the purpose of cognitive psychology from that of his many critics.

Thus, when Averroes comes to revise his theory of the material intellect, he continues to focus on the problem of how one can preserve the universal and abstract character of the objects of intellectual understanding without falling back into a Platonic account. What most worried Averroes in his later writings was the strained interpretation that his quasi-materialism placed on Aristotle's stipulation that the intellect must be immaterial and incorporeal in order to be receptive of *all* universal intelligibles. Moreover, as he likes to point out in both the revised versions of his *Epitome* and in the *Long Commentary*, the position Averroes adapted from Alexander and Ibn Bājjah everywhere violates the maxim that nothing can receive itself³⁶. In Averroes's

³⁵ AVERROES, *Epitome of « De anima »*, p. 86.

³⁶ For the corrections to the *Epitome* see pp. 86-87 ; p. 87, as well as the beginning of the Appendix, p. 90. The first interpolation begins : « But there follows from this that something would receive itself, since the imaginative intentions are themselves the intelligible intentions. And for this reason, what is clear is that it is necessary that the intellect which is in potency be something else. But what is this thing ? — would that I knew ! ». For Averroes's appeal to the impossibility of self-reception in the *Long Commentary*, see, for example, Bk. 3, comm. 4, pp. 385, l. 62 - 386, l. 80, which develops the point in the interpretation of Aristotle's own arguments ; pp. 397, l. 299 - 398, l. 343 ; and p. 400, ll. 395-399, which is directed against Ibn Bājjah.

early account the material intellect is not sufficiently distinct from the imagination to account for the genesis of an entirely new set of intelligible objects from the individual's images. But the question is not how the individual can come to be aware of these intelligibles, for the individual's link to the intelligible remains, as it always was, through images. Rather, the question becomes one of giving a more robust account of the reality of the intelligible universal without, in the process, falling back into the Platonism that Aristotle sought to avoid.

4. WHAT IS IT TO BE COGNITIVE? THE MATERIAL INTELLECT VERSUS PRIME MATTER

When Averroes comes to refine his interpretation of the Aristotelian theory of the intellect in his *Long Commentary on «De anima»*, then, he often frames his arguments and theories against the backdrop of the materialist view that informed his earlier writings. This is one reason why he is focused on explaining the conditions under which the intelligible object can become actually intelligible, since this is the point on which his earlier views seem most vulnerable.

Nonetheless, many elements of his earlier views remain in the *Long Commentary*, and while Averroes focuses on the role of the material intellect as a receptacle for universal intelligibles, he continues to draw broad parallels between the sense power (*sensus/sentiens*) and the intellect, and occasionally between the material intellect and the power of vision³⁷. Moreover, Averroes repeatedly refers to the material intellect as «comprehending» and «receiving» intelligibles, or «considering» imaginative forms, and the fundamental intellectual act of conceptualization is attributed to the material intellect³⁸. Expressions such as these might easily be interpreted as entailing that the material intellect is a separate entity with its own conscious awareness over and above that of individual humans. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes evident that Averroes uses terms such as «understanding» (*comprehendens*) and «receiving» (*recipiens*) in order to denominate a special sort of substratum that may or may not be a «subject» in the sense of a centre of awareness or conscious apprehension, whose special property is its ability to render more abstract and knowable any object that is present within it.

³⁷ AVERROES, *Long Commentary on «De anima»*, Bk. 3, comm. 4, p. 383, ll. 12, 17 ; p. 391, ll. 128-130 ; p. 401, ll. 400-418.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 383, l. 6 (*recipiens*) ; p. 383, l. 11 (*si comprehendit*) ; p. 383, l. 12 (*ante comprehensionem*) ; p. 383, ll. 17-18 (*ut comprehendat omnia et recipiat ea*) ; p. 384, l. 45 (*anima rationalis indiget considerare intentiones*) ; p. 385, ll. 62-63 (*substantia recipiens has formas*).

This point emerges most clearly from Averroes's efforts to explain the traditional comparison between the material intellect and prime matter, where the very point at issue appears to be how one differentiates between cognitive and non-cognitive subjects of the same form. Averroes argues near the beginning of his exegesis of *De anima* III, 4 that while both prime matter and the material intellect are in potency to *all* material forms, prime matter, unlike the intellect, is neither *cognoscens* nor *comprehendens*. Yet when Averroes elaborates further on the criteria by which a subject is to be deemed cognitive, he refers only to the capacity to receive *universal* as opposed to *individuated* forms :

« And the reason why that nature is distinguishing and cognizing, but prime matter is neither cognizing nor distinguishing, is that prime matter receives divided forms (*formae diversae*), namely, individuals and this-es, but [the material intellect] receives universal forms »³⁹.

For this reason, Averroes adds, the material intellect cannot be a « this something » (*aliquid hoc*), since this would entail that it receive objects precisely insofar as they are individual and this-es. But of course, while this distinction insofar as they are individual and this-es. But of course, while this distinction may suffice to differentiate the material intellect from prime matter, it is not sufficient to explain why prime matter is not cognitive, since sensation also receives individual forms, yet it *is* cognitive. Indeed, Averroes seems aware of this problem, since he immediately shifts his focus from the non-cognizance of prime matter to the simple universality of the intelligible, adding that the material intellect must in fact be differentiated from any « disposition in individual forms, be they spiritual or corporeal », where « spiritual » refers to the status of forms as received in the sensible soul. Clearly, then, by « uncomprehending » here Averroes does not primarily mean « non-cognizant » but rather, « unintelligible »⁴⁰.

This same manner of speaking recurs throughout Averroes's critique of Alexander of Aphrodisias, whom Averroes here interprets as holding that the material intellect arises directly from some corporeal mixture of the elements. Such a view is impossible, Averroes argues,

« because if this were the case, it would happen either that the being of the forms in the soul would be their being outside the soul, and thus the soul would not be

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Bk. 3, comm. 5, p. 388, ll. 32-37 : « Et causa propter quam ista natura est distinguens et cognoscens, prima autem materia neque cognoscens neque distinguens, est quia prima materia recipit formas diversas, scilicet individuales et istas, ista autem recipit formas universales ». Cf. p. 399, ll. 355-361, where Averroes states it is *valde inopinabile* for the subject of the intelligibles to be prime matter, because prime matter is neither *comprehensiva* neque *distinctiva*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 388, ll. 37-44.

comprehending, or that the intellect would have a corporeal instrument if the subject of intelligibles were a power in a body, as is the case with the senses »⁴¹.

A few lines later Averroes declares that «from the substance and nature of the elements a distinguishing, comprehending power cannot come about »⁴². And in a later reprisal of this argument, Averroes reaffirms that the material intellect cannot be attributed to any simple form arising from the complexion :

« But that the material intellect is not a power attributed to the complexion is clear from what we said before, because, since the sensible soul is not a power attributed to the complexion, how much more so the intellect ! And if [the material intellect] were attributed to the complexion, then, as Aristotle says, the form of the stone in the soul would be the same as its form outside the soul, and thus the stone would be cognizant (*comprehendens*), and many other impossibilities would arise from this position »⁴³.

What is the upshot of Averroes's defence of this aspect of his account of the material intellect ? It shows us that despite his continual references to the non-cognizant character of prime matter and other purely physical mixtures such as elemental combinations and bodily complexions, Averroes's principal concern in rejecting the intellect's individuality is to ensure that it be differentiated from sensation as a power for receiving universal rather than particular intentions. The references to the inert character of material bodies does not bespeak a concern with the problem of the conscious awareness of a knowing subject, but rather, it is meant to provide the foundation for an *a fortiori* argument that shows the inadequacy of *any* purely physical account of cognitive receptivity, in particular abstract intellection. As I will show in the final part of this paper, Averroes's own discussions of sense cognition bear out my claim here that references to the inability of prime matter to comprehend or understand have little to do with its failure to achieve the status of a

⁴¹ AVERROES, *Epitome of « De anima »*, p. 397, ll. 307-311 : « si ita fuerit, continget aut ut esse formarum in anima sit esse earum extra animam, et sic anima erit non comprehensiva, aut ut intellecta sit virtus in corpore, sicut de sensibus ».

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 398, ll. 319-320 : « A substantia enim elementorum et a natura eorum non potest fieri virtus distinguens comprehensiva ».

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 414, l. 40 - 415, l. 47 : « Quoniam autem intellectus materialis non est virtus attributa complexionem manifestum est ex predictis, quoniam, cum anima sensibilis non est virtus attributa complexionem, quanto magis intellectus ! Et si esset attributa complexionem, tunc, sicut dicit Aristoteles, esse forme lapidis in anima esset idem cum eius esse extra animam, et sic lapis esset comprehendens, et alia multa impossibilia contingentia huic positioni ».

conscious subject, and much to do with its inability to provide a subject in which forms can inhere with some degree of abstraction, however minimal.

5. THE HYLOMORPHIC ANALYSIS OF INTELLIGIBLES

Another place where it becomes clear that Averroes's conception of understanding is principally tied to explaining the constitution of the intelligible object rather than to identifying how we become aware of such objects is Averroes's hylomorphic analysis of the intelligible, which constitutes a variation on the famous and much-derided theme of the « double subject » (*duo subiecta*) of cognition⁴⁴.

Averroes develops the thesis of the double subject in the course of answering a number of possible objections to his account of the unicity of the intellect, in particular that it would entail that everyone would learn when any one person learns⁴⁵. Averroes's response to this is to argue that knowledge just is the *continuatio* or conjunction of the individual, not with the material intellect, but rather, with the intelligible object : « a human being is actually understanding only on account of the conjunction of the intelligible with him actually »⁴⁶. To be thinking is nothing but to possess or be connected in some fashion with an intelligible⁴⁷.

Averroes's explanation for how the individual is conjoined with the intelligible object is one of the most unique and original aspects of his cognitive psychology. Contrary to the caricature of the double subject doctrine often painted by Aquinas, for Averroes the individual is not an inert source of raw materials for the material intellect, but rather, a constitutive element or part of the intelligible object itself. On Averroes's model of cognition, all cognitive objects are hylomorphic composites whose *form* provides the referent through which they are true, that is, their intentional content, and whose *matter* provides a place in which they can exist at a new and higher level of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Bk. 3, comm. 4, p. 499, l. 382 ; see also 400, ll. 379-423. For Aquinas's critique of the double subject, see *DUI* c. 3, p. 303, ll. 41-60 (§63) ; pp. 303, l. 76 - 304, l. 118 (§§65-66) ; *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Bk. 3, comm. 4, p. 402, ll. 449-454.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 404, l. 501 - 405, l. 527.

⁴⁷ It is interesting to note here the parallels with Avicenna's account of understanding and his attendant denial of intellectual memory : to be understanding just is to have an intelligible form existing in one's intellect. Thus it is meaningless to suggest one possesses such a form and yet fails to be actually understanding. See AVICENNA, *Avicenna's De anima, Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*, ed. F. RAHMAN, London 1959, Bk. 5, c. 6, p. 246 ; for the medieval Latin version see *Avicenna Latinus : Liber de anima, seu sextus de naturalibus*, ed. S. VAN RIET, 2 vols., Brill - Peeters, Louvain - Leiden 1968.

abstraction from their corresponding existence in the external world or in an inferior cognitive faculty⁴⁸. Hence, the material intellect and the sense images of individual humans conjointly form a single hylomorphic unit that is itself the intelligible object. Averroes insists that this intelligible object can in no way be considered a « third thing » distinct from its two components, as is necessitated by the very nature of hylomorphic composition :

« And it is clear that matter and form are conjoined with each other in such a way that the composite (*congregatum*) from them is a single thing (*unicum*), and especially the material intellect and the actually understood intention ; for what is composed from them is not some third thing other than them, just as is the case with other composites of matter and form »⁴⁹.

Thus Averroes's solution to the problem of individuating the intelligible is that its formal part, the imagined intention, is conjoined with the individual, whereas its material part or subject, the material intellect, is something separate⁵⁰.

The upshot of all this, then, is to emphasize once again that Averroes does not treat the material intellect as the subject in which awareness of the intelligible is realized, but rather, as the subject in which the intelligible comes to exist *as* an abstract intelligible, the missing link in the knowing relation between the individual and the intelligible object. That is, just as images are not actually intelligibles, and so must be rendered able to move the material intellect through the abstracting activity of the agent intellect, so too these intelligibles, once actualized and realized, cannot take up residence in

⁴⁸ The fact that Averroes uses the term *subiectum* equivocally exacerbates the difficulty in articulating the philosophical issue that is at stake in this article. For Averroes, the distinction is not between a knowing, conscious *subject* and an inert *object known*, but between a *subject of existence* (*subiectum per quod est forma existens* ; *subiectum per quod intellecta sunt unum entium in mundo*), which contains intentional objects or forms, usually a faculty such as sense, imagination, or intellect ; and a *subject of truth* (*subiectum per quod est vera*) or a referent, which we would usually call an object. For these phrases see *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 4, p. 400, ll. 384, 387, 388-389. For a contemporary use of the term « object » to translate the notion of the « subject of truth », see the excerpts from the *Long Commentary* translated in A. HYMAN and J. J. WALSH, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages : The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*, 2d ed., Indianapolis 1973, pp. 327-328.

⁴⁹ AVERROES, *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 5, p. 404, ll. 503-507 : « Et est etiam manifestum quod materia et forma copulantur adinvicem ita quod congregatum ex eis sit unicum, et maxime intellectus materialis et intentio intellecta in actu ; quod enim componitur ex eis non est aliquod tertium aliud ab eis sicut est de aliis compositis ex materia et forma ».

⁵⁰ This point itself also provides an important corrective to one of Aquinas's standard criticisms of Averroes, which rests upon the claim that since phantasms or images are that *from* which intelligibles are abstracted, they cannot serve to unite us to those intelligibles, but rather,

material, individual forms, such as human souls, and so the material intellect is posited as their « place »⁵¹.

6. THE MATERIAL INTELLECT AND THE TRANSPARENT MEDIUM

That the material intellect should be understood as a « place » in which not only the intelligibles of material forms, but also the agent intellect itself, can be made accessible as intelligible objects for human knowers, is especially well captured by Averroes's model of the material intellect as the analogue of the transparent medium in vision. While this analogy is primarily employed by Averroes in his discussion of the material intellect's knowledge of the agent intellect under the rubric of the traditional theme of conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with separate substances, Averroes gives no indication that the parallel with the medium is inappropriate to describe the material intellect's general role in our knowledge of the material world, especially since this knowledge is, in itself, a necessary precondition in Averroes's view for conjunction.

The medium analogy occurs once in each of Averroes's principal treatments of the material intellect and its relation to the agent intellect. The first passage comes at the end of Averroes's most controversial discussion of the unicity of the intellect in the commentary on *De anima* III, 4, as a way of illustrating the fundamental relation between the agent intellect and the

they separate us from them. Because of his doctrine of the intelligible species, Aquinas distinguishes sharply between the role of images as the source from which intelligibles are abstracted, and their role as the locus in which thought is actually realized — in Thomistic terms, between « abstraction » (*abstractio*, *ST I*, q. 84, a. 6) and « conversion to phantasms » (*conversio ad phantasmata*, *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7). Hence, in *DUI* c. 3, p. 303, ll. 82-86 (§65), Aquinas argues : « Si ergo species intelligibilis non est forma intellectus possibilis nisi secundum quod est abstracta a fantasmatis, sequitur quod per speciem intelligibilem non continuatur fantasmatis, sed magis ab eis est separatus ». For Averroes, however, these two functions of images are one and the same, a point that holds true for him from the days of the *Epitome* of « *De anima* » through to the *Long Commentary*.

⁵¹ See AVERROES, *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 6, p. 416, ll. 92-97, echoing *De anima* III, 4, 429a27-28, cited at n. 6 above. This phrase also appears in Averroes's *Long Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, where the potential intellect is said to be « like a place and not like matter » (*ka-al-makān lā ka-al-hayūlī*) for the agent intellect. See AVERROES, *Tafsīr mā ba'd al-ṭabī'ah*, ed. M. BOUYGES, 2 vols., Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut 1967 (Bibliotheca Arabica Scholasticorum, Séries Arabe 6), Bk. 12, comm. 17d, p. 1489, l. 15. The emphasis on the intellect as providing the substratum of existence for intelligible universals is also reflected in al-Fārābī's *Treatise on the Intellect*. See *Risālah fī al-'aql*, ed. M. BOUYGES, Beirut 1948, pp. 17, l. 9 - 18, l. 1 : « When the actual intelligibles arise, they come to be at that time one of the existents in the world », a line that Averroes himself echoes in the *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 5, p. 400, ll. 388-389 : « illud per quod intellecta sunt unum entium in mundo ».

material intellect in making possible our knowledge of intelligibles drawn from the material world :

« Indeed, you should know that the relation of the agent intellect to [the material] intellect is the relation of light to the transparency, and the relation of material forms to it is the relation of colour to the transparency. For just as light is the perfection of the transparency, so is the agent intellect the perfection of the material intellect. And just as the transparency is not moved by nor does it receive colour except when [light] illuminates [it], so too this intellect [i.e., the material intellect] does not receive the intelligibles which are here except according as it is perfected by [the agent] intellect and illuminated by it. And just as light makes colour in potency to be in act in such a way that it can move the transparency, so too the agent intellect makes the intentions in potency to be understood in act in such a way that the material intellect receives them. This, therefore, is how one should understand the agent and the material intellects »⁵².

The comparison between the material intellect and the medium is again drawn in the course of Averroes's commentary on *De anima* III, 5 in order to support the claim that the agent intellect is a more worthy object of understanding for the material intellect than are material forms :

« [The material intellect] understands the agent intellect, whose relation to it is, as we have said, like the relation of light to the transparent. For it must be believed that since the intellect which is in potency has been shown to be eternal and to be naturally perfected through material forms, it is more worthy of being naturally perfected by immaterial forms, which are understood in themselves »⁵³.

Averroes then refers the reader to his more developed account of the

⁵² AVERROES, *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 5, pp. 410, l. 688 - 411, l. 702 : « Immo debes scire quod respectus intellectus agentis ad istum intellectum est respectus lucis ad diaffonum, et respectus formarum materialium ad ipsum est respectus coloris ad diaffonum. Quemadmodum enim lux est perfectio diaffoni, sic intellectus agens est perfectio materialis. Et quemadmodum diaffonum non movetur a colore neque recipit eum nisi quando lucet, ita iste intellectus non recipit intellecta que sunt hic nisi secundum quod perficitur per illum intellectum et illuminatur per ipsum. Et quemadmodum lux facit colorem in potentia esse in actu ita quod possit movere diaffonum, ita intellectus agens facit intentiones in potentia intellectas in actu ita quod recipit eas intellectus materialis. Secundum hoc igitur est intelligendum de intellectu materiali et agenti ».

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Bk. 3, comm. 20, p. 450, ll. 196-202 : « intelligit intellectum agentem, cuius proportio est ad ipsum, sicut diximus, sicut lucis ad diaffonum. Opinandum est enim quod iste intellectus qui est in potentia, cum declaratum est quod est eternus et quod innatus est perfici per formas materiales, dignior est ut sit innatus perfici per formas non materiales, que sunt in se intellecte ».

problem of conjunction with the agent intellect, at the end of his commentary on *De anima* III, 6, for a fuller consideration of how this model functions⁵⁴.

One of the most important features of Averroes's account of conjunction in this context is the deliberate use that Averroes makes of parallels between knowledge of the agent intellect through conjunction and knowledge of material forms. In particular, just as Averroes analyzes simple, primary intelligibles as hylomorphic composites of the material intellect and the imagined intentions of the individual, here he analyzes complex, secondary intelligibles (which he calls « voluntary »), as quasi-hylomorphic units composed of the agent intellect and the speculative intelligibles that we have previously acquired, that is, the habitual intellect :

« And for every action composed from an aggregate of two diverse things, it is necessary that one of them be like the matter and the instrument and that the other be like the form or the agent. Therefore the intellect which is in us is composed from the habitual intellect and the agent intellect, either in such a way that the propositions are like the matter and the agent intellect is like the form, or in such a way that the propositions are like the instrument and the agent intellect is like the efficient cause ; for the state of these two things is similar »⁵⁵.

While Averroes admits that none of these relations is to be understood in a literal or univocal sense, he is insistent that all that is necessary for the hylomorphic analysis to apply is that there be « a relation (*respectum*) according to which the habitual intellect may be assimilated to matter and the agent intellect assimilated to form »⁵⁶. Averroes then calls on the analogy between the material intellect and the medium to explicate the way in which the agent intellect can be related to the habitual intellect as form to matter. For what is required, says Averroes, is that there should be a subject common to both the agent intellect and the speculative intelligibles that constitute the habitual intellect, a subject that is capable of receiving both objects through one and the same reception :

⁵⁴ For a more extensive discussion of the role played by the analogy between the medium and the transparency in Averroes's account of conjunction with the agent intellect, see D. L. BLACK, *Conjunction and the Identity of Knower and Known in Averroes*, « American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly », 73, 1999, pp. 159-184

⁵⁵ AVERROES, *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 3, comm. 20, p. 497, ll. 509-517 : « Et omnis actio facta ex congregato duorum diversorum, necesse est ut alterum duorum illorum sit quasi materia et instrumentum, et aliud sit quasi forma aut agens. Intellectus igitur qui est in nobis componitur ex intellectu qui est in habitu et intellectu agenti, aut ita quod propositiones sunt quasi materia et intellectus agens est quasi forma, aut ita quod propositiones est quasi efficiens ; dispositio enim in hoc est consimilis ».

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 498, ll. 546-548.

« But since we posit the material intellect to be eternal and the speculative intelligibles to be generable and corruptible in the way in which we have said, and [since we posit] that the material intellect understands both, namely, material and separate forms, it is clear that the subject of the speculative intelligibles and of the agent intellect in this way is one and the same, namely, the material intellect. And this is like the transparent, which receives colour and light simultaneously; and light is the efficient cause of colour (*efficiens colorem*) »⁵⁷.

The material intellect, like the medium in visual perception, simultaneously receives and is perfected or actualized both by the object known — the intelligibles — and by the agent that actualizes or perfects those objects themselves, the agent intellect. The point is, of course, primarily about the agent intellect, that is, it is meant to explain how, in virtue of the normal processes of cognition, the material intellect can be said to receive the agent intellect along with material intelligibles. But the model also has implications for the material intellect's role in all acts of human cognition, and Averroes never repudiates the general implications of likening the material intellect to the medium. In particular the analogy suggests a desire to downplay any tendency we might have to view the material intellect as anything like a principal agent of thinking or centre of conscious awareness. Rather, the material intellect is more of a facilitator or instrument that enables intelligible objects to be conveyed to an individual cognitive agent, and in this way Averroes's view reflects Aristotle's own tendency to speak of the intellect as that « *by which* the soul thinks and understands »⁵⁸.

7. *SENSUS EST INTENTIO*⁵⁹

Averroes's use of the analogy between the medium of sensation and the material intellect also lends legitimacy to the claim that the material intellect can be described as « understanding » (*comprehendens*) without this implying that the material intellect is aware of the intelligibles realized in it in the standard sense in which individual humans are aware of their sensible, imaginative, and intelligible objects. For this claim harmonizes perfectly

⁵⁷ AVERROES, *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, p. 499, ll. 559-566: « Nos autem cum posuerimus intellectum materiale esse eternum et intellecta speculativa esse generabilia et corruptibilia eo modo quo diximus, et quod intellectus materialis intelligit utrunque, scilicet formas materiales et formas abstractas, manifestum est quod subiectum intellectorum speculativorum et intellectus agentis secundum hunc modum est idem et unum, scilicet materialis. Et simile huic est diaffonum, quod recipit colorem et lucem insimul; et lux est efficiens colorem ».

⁵⁸ ARISTOTLE, *De anima* III, 4, 429a10-11; cf. n. 15 above.

⁵⁹ AVERROES, *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 2, comm. 123, p. 318, l. 8.

with the view that the sensible medium itself, usually air, is able to receive sensible forms, like colours and sounds, spiritually rather than physically.

In all of his accounts of sensation, Averroes assigns the medium two principal and closely related mediating functions: the first is to enable a connection between the sensible object and the person doing the sensing; and the second is to provide a middle ground between the purely physical status of the sensible form as it exists in the material world and its spiritual existence as an object of knowledge in the sense power. Both functions are closely tied to Averroes's adaptation of the theory of grades of abstraction developed by Avicenna against the backdrop of Aristotle's identification of cognition (*aisthêsis*) as a reception of the form of the known object without the matter⁶⁰.

In his discussion of sensible abstraction in the *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Averroes is principally concerned with the basic distinction between sensible change and standard physical changes. A sense power is unique, according to Averroes, because it is

« naturally apt to be perfected by the *intentions* of sensible things, not by the sensible things themselves. Otherwise, the being of colour in vision and in the body would be the same. And if that were the case, then its being in vision would not be cognition (*comprehensio*) »⁶¹.

The same point is reiterated in Averroes's remarks on the meaning of « receiving the form without the matter » in his commentary on *De anima* II, 12. To receive form *with* matter would be a description of physical becoming and involve no change in the mode of being of the received form: « For if it received them with the matter, then they would have *the same being* in the soul and outside the soul »⁶². Sensible cognition would then be a duplication of the thing, and not

⁶⁰ While this is often treated as applying primarily to intellection, Aristotle introduces this formula as a definition of *aisthêsis*. See *De anima* II, 12, 424a18-19, and n. 5 above. In the Arabic text of Avicenna's *De anima*, the term « receiving » in the formula « receiving the form » is rendered as *akhdh*, « taking », which carries overtones of « extracting » or « abstracting ». See Avicenna's *De anima*, Bk. 2, c. 2, pp. 58-67. For an excellent account of the influence of Avicenna's scale of abstraction on Averroes, see M. BLAUSTEIN, *Averroes on the Imagination and the Intellect*, Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1984, pp. 82-90. For an alternative account, see D. L. BLACK, *Memory, Time and Individuals in Averroes's Psychology*, « Medieval Philosophy and Theology », 5, 1996, pp. 161-187.

⁶¹ *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, Bk. 2, comm. 62, p. 223, ll. 25-28: « Et si non, tunc esse coloris in visu et in corpore esset idem; et si ita esset, tunc esse eius in visu non esset *comprehensio* ». Cf. comm. 60, p. 221, ll. 42-44: « movent enim sensus secundum quod sunt intentiones, cum in materia non sint intentiones in actu, sed in potentia ».

⁶² *Ibid.*, comm. 121, p. 317, ll. 15-17: « Si enim reciperet eas cum materia, tunc idem esse haberent in anima et extra animam ».

its introduction into a new mode of being within the knower. As in the earlier passage, Averroes then proceeds to assert an explicit connection between existence in the soul, understanding, and intentionality. It is simply by their existence in the soul that sensible forms become understood *intentions*, setting them apart from those same forms as they exist outside the soul in material things :

« And therefore in the soul they are intentions and understandings (*comprehensiones*), whereas outside the soul they are neither intentions nor understandings, but material things which are in no way comprehended »⁶³.

Passages such as these, like their parallels in Averroes's discussion of the differences between the material intellect and prime matter, have often been taken to indicate that for Averroes *intentionality* implies *consciousness*: whatever receives a form as an intention becomes cognizant of that form, that is, consciously aware of it. On such a reading, to say that *x* is the recipient of a particular kind of intention, *i*, is to say that *x* becomes *aware* of *i*. If this is the way that Averroes's remarks on sensation are to be read, then his claims that the material intellect receives universal intentions should, likewise, imply that it is the conscious subject that knows them. Such an interpretation, however, is more difficult to uphold in the face some of Averroes's other remarks about sensible reception.

The most important of these occurs when Averroes calls upon the maxim, *sensus est intentio*, to explain Aristotle's observation that the presence of intense sensibles corrupts the sense organs. When the motion that the sensible object effects in the organ is more than it can tolerate physically, this will « dissolve that intention through which what senses is sensing »⁶⁴. That the intention is accordingly comprised in some way by a physical event is captured strikingly by the comparison with a powerful noise dissolving the consonance in a musical instrument, which consonance is, Averroes says, « the intention existing in it »⁶⁵. Even musical instruments can possess intentions, although presumably we would not want to say that they are percipient in the sense of being conscious of the music that they produce.

By the same token, the fact that plants are unable to sense is also explained by Averroes in terms that seem to have no direct bearing on the plant's lack

⁶³ AVERROES, *Long Commentary on « De anima »*, p. 317, ll. 17-20 : « Et ideo in anima sunt intentiones et comprehensiones, et extra animam non sunt neque intentiones neque comprehensiones, sed res materiales non comprehense omnino ».

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, comm. 123, p. 318, l. 12, commenting on *De anima* II, 12, 424a28-32.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 318, l. 14-319, l. 15. The example of the musical instrument is used by Aristotle himself to illustrate the notion of the *logos* of sensation at *De anima* II, 12, 424a28-32.

of consciousness, but rather, point simply to the plant's lacking the requisite physical conditions under which the object's intentional being can be established. Averroes is in this case commenting on Aristotle's notoriously difficult remark that plants are lacking in the ability to sense because they lack a *mean* (*mesotês*), which in the Latin version of Averroes's text is rendered as *medium*⁶⁶. Quite naturally, then, Averroes assumes that Aristotle refers to the fact that plants lack the *medium* of sensation, for example, flesh in the case of touch⁶⁷. The suggestion, then, is that a physical medium is a necessary condition for the possession by physical organisms of perceptual capacities, a suggestion that is borne out by Averroes's various discussions of the role of media. But once again, what is noticeably absent here is any concern with the conscious awareness on the part of potential percipients of the objects which are able to exist intentionally in them.

8. THE MEDIA OF SENSATION

To understand the exact function of media in Averroes's theory of perception, it is necessary to turn to his earlier and more elaborate accounts of sensation in the *Epitomes of «De anima»* and *«Parva naturalia»*. In the *Epitome of «De anima»*, Averroes treats the medium as explaining the higher degree of spirituality or abstraction that is attained by the non-contact senses, such as vision and hearing, that is, it accounts for the fact that these senses are not physically affected by their objects. On such an understanding the medium is not merely a conduit from sense object to sense power, it also represents a *middle ground* between sensible and spiritual alteration :

« And [the] medium's reception of [the sensibles] occurs by way of a relation to the reception of the one sensing ; that is, [it is] in some sort of middle state between the material and the spiritual. This is also one of the things which requires the existence of the medium, for nature only acts by degrees »⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ ARISTOTLE, *De anima*, II, 12, 424b1. The *Middle Commentary* gives us some sense of the Arabic terminology underlying the original of Averroes's *Long Commentary*. There Averroes first refers to the plant lacking « balance » or « equilibrium » (*al-isti' dlā*), which he identifies with a « mean » or « medium » (*al-mutawassit*), « due to which it can apprehend opposites ». See *Averroës : Middle Commentary*, ed. IVRY cit., Bk. 2, §233, p.88, ll. 5-8. In his commentary on this passage, Ivry traces the language of « equilibrium » to Themistius (p. 188, n. 29).

⁶⁷ AVERROES, *Long Commentary on «De anima»*, Bk. 2, comm. 124, p. 319, ll. 7-8. Most modern commentators take *mesotês* to be a synonym for *logos*, thus referring back to the proportion or harmony implied by the instrument example. This may also be reflected in Averroes's identification of « medium » and « equilibrium » in the *Middle Commentary* (see n. 66 above).

⁶⁸ AVERROES, *Epitome of «De anima»*, p. 30.

On the basis of this principle Averroes argues that the medium itself must in some sense be capable of undergoing a more-than-physical alteration: it too must receive the forms of the sensibles « with a reception intermediate between the material and the spiritual, as is the case with the impression of colours in air and water »⁶⁹. Once again, this reinforces the important point that for Averroes even non-percipient bodies such as media undergo a quasi-spiritual reception, even though air and water do not perceive the qualities they convey. The assumption that intentionality and spiritual reception are meant to account for those aspects of perception that involve conscious awareness will not bear scrutiny in texts such as these.

The claim that the medium partakes of a spiritual or at least quasi-spiritual reception of its objects is most fully developed by Averroes in the *De sensu* portion of his *Epitome of the « Parva naturalia »*, in the course of his refutation of an active theory of sensation according to which sensible forms pre-exist in the soul and are merely awakened by external stimuli⁷⁰. Averroes argues that if such a theory were true, we should be able to exercise our vision at will regardless of the presence of a sensible object; moreover, it would make the possession of corporeal sense organs superfluous. Nonetheless, Averroes also rejects a purely passive conception of sensation as nothing but a corporeal affection of the sense organ by the sensible object. The doctrine of the spirituality of sensible change is then introduced as a middle ground between these two extreme views of sensation. As empirical justification of the claim that the act of sense perception transcends the mere physical affecting of the sense organ, Averroes points to the ability of the senses to perceive contrary forms and to be affected by bodies much greater in magnitude than they are, abilities which entail the transcending of the normal physical limitations on bodily reception⁷¹. Moreover, Averroes reasserts his claim that

⁶⁹ AVERROES, *Epitome of « De anima »*, p. 30.

⁷⁰ This is somewhat ironic, since at one point Aquinas suggests the Averroists might be using the extramission theory of vision as the model for their theory of unicity. See *DUI* c. 4, p. 310, ll. 233-264 (§§97-98).

⁷¹ AVERROES, *Talkhīṣ kitāb al-ḥiss wa-al-maḥsūs (Epitome of the Parva naturalia)*, ed. H. BLUMBERG, Cambridge (Mass.) 1972, pp. 23, l. 3-24, l. 9; English translation by H. BLUMBERG, *Averroes: Epitome of « Parva Naturalia »*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1961, pp. 15-16; medieval Latin translation edited by E. SHIELDS and H. BLUMBERG, *Compendia librorum Aristotelis qui Parva naturalia vocantur*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1949, pp. 29-30. The same point is also made in the *Epitome of « De anima »*, 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 external to the soul is the existence of an individual subject, divided by the division of matter. And as for the existence in the sensible power, it 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, so that it is like the vitreous humour, which,

these same characteristics apply to the medium itself. Since the medium must simultaneously transmit contrary forms to the organ of the eye, it too must possess a capacity for spiritual reception :

« The existence of forms in media is a kind of intermediate between the spiritual and the corporeal. This is true for the reason that the existence of forms outside the soul is completely corporeal (*jismānī maḥḍ*), whereas their existence within the soul is completely spiritual ; consequently, their existence in the medium (*mutawassīṭ*) is an intermediate stage between the spiritual and the corporeal »⁷².

The most unusual feature of the medium in this text is the function it is assigned in ensuring that the senses maintain the particular, corporeal relation to specific external individuals that differentiates their perceptions from those of the intellect. Since both sensation and intellection are forms of abstraction, and since both bear principally upon the reception of the forms of material things, the difference between their respective objects — the fact that one is particular and the other universal — can only be explained by some factor which links the sense to a particular material object. The medium, in other words, functions as a sort of connector which preserves the relation of the sensible act of perception to a material, particular thing. The result here is most surprising — were it not for the medium, the particularity of sensation could not be explained, and all knowledge would be of universals :

« If the objects were perceived in the same manner, both universal and particular intentions would be the same (*bi-jīḥah wāḥidah*), which is absurd. Since this is so, 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,

in its smallness, receives the [form of] the hemisphere, which arrives in this power, just 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 ». The example of the simultaneous perception of contraries can be traced back to Alexander of Aphrodisias's commentary on the *De sensu*. See ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS, *In librum De sensu commentarium*, ed. P. WENDLAND, *Commentarium in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. 3, pt. 1, Berlin 1901, pp. 167-168 ; English translation by A. TOWEY, *On Aristotle's « On Sense Perception »*, London 2000, pp. 150-151.

⁷² AVERROES, *Epitome of the « Parva naturalia »*, p. 25, ll. 7-10 ; Latin pp. 31, l. 45-32, l. 48. ; English in BLUMBERG, *Epitome of « Parva Naturalia »*, p. 16.

the intentions that could be perceived would be only universals and not particulars. [...] It is therefore clear from the above discussion 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 (*bi-tawassut*) »⁷³.

This important passage certainly reinforces my main contention that the focus of Averroes's cognitive psychology is not primarily to explain conscious awareness of the contents of one's mind, but rather, to specify the conditions under which the object known is elevated to the appropriate degree of abstractness. Still, the specific claims made here appear to introduce a problematic shift in emphasis that threatens the consistency of Averroes's project⁷⁴. In his discussion of the material intellect's role in intellection, and in particular the contrast that he draws between the material intellect and prime matter, sensation appears to be taken as the paradigm case of cognition, and a special subject, the material intellect, must be posited to explain how the object known becomes a pure universal. But in this discussion of sensation, Averroes seems to imply that *intellection* is the paradigm case, and something *else*, namely the medium, must be posited to maintain the object's connection to particulars, such that the existence of the object in the soul seems to be sufficient to establish its universality. The underlying function of the medium remains the same, however, since in both cases it is the medium or its analogue, the material intellect, that raises the object to the level of abstraction that it has. The medium and the material intellect serve to establish the object as a particular and a universal *intention* respectively, for without either medium cognitive being would not be possible at all.

9. CONCLUSION

Apart from the caveat just raised, I think we can conclude from Averroes's treatments of both the material intellect and the media of sensation that there is a remarkable continuity in his cognitive psychology, and that a single model of

⁷³ AVERROES, *Epitome of the « Parva naturalia »*, p. 25.2-7, p. 26, ll. 4-5 ; Latin p. 31, ll. 36-44, p. 32, ll. 52-55 ; English in BLUMBERG, *Epitome of « Parva Naturalia »*, pp. 16-17 (slightly modified).

⁷⁴ Two possible explanations suggest themselves for the shift. The first is that the stance taken by Averroes in the *Epitome of the « Parva naturalia »* is merely dialectical, that is, Averroes overstates his point in order to emphasize the distinctness of each grade of abstraction, not only from purely physical being but also from all other grades of abstraction. The other explanation is chronological. On Averroes's early « materialist » view of the intellect (which he would have upheld at the time he wrote the *Epitome of the « Parva naturalia »*), the medium really is necessary to differentiate sense cognition from intellection, since universal intelligibles emerge from dispositions within the imaginative forms, which are themselves images of *particulars*. But because Averroes was most concerned to revise his account of the intellect, he did not go back and revisit related elements in his cognitive psychology that needed tweaking to fit his new noetics.

the mind unites Averroes's accounts of sensation and intellection. At no time did Averroes entertain the idea that the mark of the mental at any level was consciousness, and at no time did he assume that to call anything « understanding », or to attribute intentional or spiritual being to its contents, implied that it was a conscious, knowing subject. And this is the case whether we are talking about intellects, sense powers, sense organs, media, or even musical instruments.

Indeed, there is some sense in which Averroes's comparison of the material intellect to the medium of sensation helps to clarify puzzling aspects in his account of sensation itself. For if one assumes that the concepts of spiritual reception, intentionality, and cognizance are meant to explicate the capacity for conscious perception, as many readers of both Averroes and Aquinas have done, then the attribution of spirituality to the medium and of intentionality to the strings of an instrument seems fantastic, a move that wipes out the entire explanatory power of the scale of abstraction that is so central to all of Averroes's accounts of cognition. But when it is recognized that here, as in his account of the material intellect, Averroes's interests and assumptions about cognition are not as obvious as they appear at first glance, the Commentator emerges as the defender of an interesting and systematic version of Aristotelian cognitive psychology⁷⁵.

What is ironic in all this is that Aquinas himself upheld more or less the same understanding of the function of media in sense perception, at least in part under the influence of Averroes's psychological commentaries, in particular the *Epitome of the « Parva naturalia »*⁷⁶. Indeed, a number of recent commentators

⁷⁵ Amongst contemporary Averroes scholars, Herbert Davidson discusses the analogy between the material intellect and the medium at some length. Rather than take this analogy as an indication that Averroes is up to something quite different from what he is standardly assumed to be doing, Davidson sees it as a sign of just how bizarre Averroes's mature psychology had become: « Averroes apparently could no longer accept the comparison of the material intellect to an animal organ. He therefore compares the material intellect not to the eye, but instead to the medium, which is distinct from the seeing subject ». While Davidson admits that the intention of the medium analogy is to indicate how the material intellect « enables the *individual human soul* to become conscious of intelligible thoughts », he nonetheless continues to assume that the material intellect is the principal thinker of those intelligibles: « Comparing the material intellect to the visual medium, rather than to the eye, does not, as will appear, exclude the material intellect from *having its own thoughts* of the physical world » (DAVIDSON, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, pp. 318-319). The analogy between the sense medium and the material intellect has also been noted in a more neutral fashion by P. ROSEMANN, *Is Kant's Doctrine on the Bewußtsein überhaupt Averroistic?*, « American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly », 73, 1999, pp. 185-230.

⁷⁶ There is at least one place in which Aquinas himself cites with approval the Averroist comparison of the material intellect with the medium. The context is once again a polemical one, but the target in this case is the separateness, not of the material intellect, but rather of the agent intellect as it was understood by Avicenna: « Primum autem horum non videtur esse conveniens, quia intellectus possibilis secundum suam naturam est in potentia ad species intelligibiles actu; unde comparatur ad eas sicut diaphanum ad lucem vel ad species coloris » (*SCG* II, c. 76).

on Aquinas's psychological writings have taken great interest in his remarks on the spirituality of sensation and his own attribution of cognitive states to the transparent medium, apparently unaware of the Averroistic inspiration for this reading of Aristotle⁷⁷. Various interpretations have been offered of Aquinas's remarks in these texts, including the suggestion that Aquinas does not wish to identify cognition with « the everyday mental states of folk psychology », such as beliefs and desires⁷⁸. Consciousness is not explicitly mentioned as an *explanandum* eliminated by Aquinas, but this interpretation of Aquinas is similar to the interpretation that I have just put forward regarding Averroes.

Indeed, such an interpretation is an attractive one for explaining the common principles shared by the Thomistic and Averroist accounts of sense perception and its apparatus. But for Aquinas, unlike Averroes, the same story about the nature of cognition cannot be extended into the realm of intellectual understanding, as is clear from Aquinas's heated attacks on Averroes, most of which we have seen presuppose that the material intellect is primarily a locus of personal consciousness, and treat it as a mind just like ordinary, individual human minds.

Why, then, did Aquinas follow Averroes's naturalism in sensation, and then make such a radical break with him when it came to intellection? One obvious answer seems to be that in Aquinas's eyes the *philosophical* possibility for establishing personal immortality rests heavily on the claim that the individual as such knows abstract universals. By contrast, for all the times that Averroes revisited his interpretation of *De anima* III, 4, there never was an alternative reading of that text that could offer individual human beings

⁷⁷ Aquinas echoes Averroes's *Epitome of the « Parva naturalia »*, which was known to him in Latin translation, in *Sentencia libri de sensu et sensato*, tract. 1, c. 18, pp. 99, l. 191 - 100, l. 226 (lect. 19, nn. 291-292). For recent secondary literature on this topic in Aquinas see S. COHEN, *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Immaterial Reception of Sensible Forms*, « Philosophical Review », 91, 1982, pp. 193-209; P. HOFFMAN, *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Halfway State of Sensible Being*, « Philosophical Review », 99, 1990, pp. 73-92; and M. TWEEDALE, *Origins of the Medieval Theory that Sensation is an Immaterial Reception of a Form*, « Philosophical Topics », 20, 1992, pp. 215-231. Tweedale is one of the few authors to draw attention to the antecedents in Averroes. The most recent examination of this issue is found in R. PASNAU, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 47-60. See also the recent review article by J. P. O'CALLAGHAN, *Aquinas, Cognitive Theory, and Analogy: Apropos of Robert Pasnau's « Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages »*, « American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly », 76, 2002, pp. 451-482, along with Pasnau's response, *What is Cognition? A Reply to Some Critics*, « American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly », 76, 2002, pp. 483-490.

⁷⁸ PASNAU, *Theories of Cognition*, p. 50. Pasnau lists « belief, desire, knowledge, and so on » as other such folk-psychological states that Aquinas is attempting to avoid. The specific issue of « cognitive air » is raised by O'CALLAGHAN, *Aquinas, Cognitive Theory, Analogy*, pp. 469-482, and it is the main focus of Pasnau's reply in *What is Cognition?*

any form of personal immortality, be it a spiritual immortality of the soul alone or a form of bodily resurrection. In sharp contrast both to Avicenna in his own tradition and to Aquinas in the Christian West, at no point in his career does Averroes ever seem to have thought that Aristotle's remarks about the possible separability of the intellect had anything to do with whether or not the *individual* could survive the death of the body⁷⁹. On Averroes's original reading of the *De anima*, there is no post-mortem survival of the intellect, since it is nothing but a disposition in the body's imaginative forms. As he notes in his *Epitome* of that work, «because these intelligibles are essentially conjoined with imaginative forms, they fall into oblivion when these imaginative forms pass away»⁸⁰. Not surprisingly, then, when Averroes later comes to reject his early materialist account of the intellect, he continues to be completely indifferent to the problem of personal immortality. According to Averroes's later doctrine of the unicity of the intellect, there is no individual survival of the death of the body because the only eternal subject of intelligibles is a separate principle through which all human knowers understand for the duration of their individual existence, in just the same way that all they all see and hear through the same light and the same air.

Now while neither Aquinas nor Averroes infers his position on the status of the material intellect directly from his stance on the immortality of the individual human soul, it seems plausible to suggest that it was less pressing for someone like Averroes to view intellection from the perspective of the personal awareness of thinking, since without the hope of survival after death consciousness is a datum that plays no special explanatory function within human psychology⁸¹. Freed from the need to address problems of personal immortality, Averroes's attention could remain focused on a way to avoid separate Platonic forms without violating the Aristotelian principle that the intellect must remain completely unmixed with matter. In his later writings, Averroes believed he had accomplished that goal by positing the existence of a separate material as well as a separate agent intellect. But such an intellect

⁷⁹ It seems significant in this regard that the only Islamic philosopher who unequivocally upheld personal immortality was Avicenna, someone for whom consciousness or awareness (*shu'ūr*) was a central philosophical problem, as evidenced in his famous «flying man» argument. In contrast, there are few references to consciousness in Averroes's writings on the intellect. For the principal Avicennian accounts of the «flying man» and an excellent discussion of their philosophical implications, see M. E. MARMURA, *Avicenna's 'Flying Man' in Context*, «Monist», 69, 1986, pp. 383-395.

⁸⁰ AVERROES, *Epitome of «De anima»*, p. 81.

⁸¹ As I have argued in *Consciousness and Self-Knowledge*, I think Averroes would probably follow a number of contemporary Aristotelian scholars by locating self-awareness and consciousness in the common sense faculty.

was never understood by Averroes as a superhuman replica of ordinary human beings, possessing all the qualities that we observe in individual human knowers but on a grander scale. Rather, the material intellect is a mind only to the extent that it serves as the *receptacle* for all the universal forms that are culled from the material world by the human imagination. And human knowers have a privileged cognitive access to this mind because the intelligibles it contains are nothing but universalized, abstract versions of their own imaginative forms.