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Averroes on the Ontology of the Human Soul

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While the ontology of the soul is something to be dealt within philosophy, the issue of the possibility of the *post-mortem* existence of the soul in the case of human beings seems to require venturing beyond the strictly philosophical works of Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and into his religious writings. This is because claims made by Averroes in religious or dialectical writings regarding the human soul and its continuing existence after death have a role in the consideration of his ontology of soul. This is particularly the case since he explicitly refused to allow for a theory of double truth, one in religious matters and another in philosophy, thereby insisting implicitly that on issues such as that of the existence of the afterlife there is a single truth in a doctrine that can suitably be labeled the unity of truth.¹ And in his self-professed religious treatise *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl wa-taqrīr mā bayna al-sharī'a wa-l-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl* (*The Book of the Distinction of Discourse and the Establishment of the Connection between the Religious Law and Philosophy*)² as well as in his dialectical *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*)³ both perhaps written ca. 1179–81, Averroes expressly states that the afterlife of the individual soul is a religious doctrine that must be affirmed, although he also holds that its precise nature is a matter of considerable variation of opinion.⁴ But there is much more to this issue.

Averroes also explains in detail in his *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* that his proper views are to be found in his demonstrative, i.e. philosophical works, and not in dialectical works such as his *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*,⁵ something also indicated in the *Faṣl* where he writes regarding scriptural interpretation in cases of conflict with scientifically founded truths,

it is obligatory that interpretations be established only in books using demonstrations. For if they are in books using demonstrations, no one but those adept in demonstration will get at them. Whereas, if they are established in other than demonstrative books with poetical and rhetorical or dialectical methods used in them, as Abû Hamid [al-Ghazali] does, that is an error against the Law and against wisdom.⁶

And in the most sophisticated of those philosophical works on the soul,⁷ his *Short, Middle and Long* commentaries on *De Anima* of Aristotle, he sets out teachings on the nature of the soul that are fully *incompatible* with his own claims for the existence of the afterlife in the religious or dialectical works mentioned above. For in each of his significantly differing philosophical accounts of the soul in those commentaries on the *De Anima* his analyses of the nature and activities of the soul leave no room for personal immortality or any other sort of continued existence on the part of individual human substances. My task here, then, is not only to expound Averroes's philosophical teachings on the ontology of the soul but also to address at least tentatively the issue of his religious views and also that of whether his principled rejection of double truth remains cogent in this case.

In what follows I first show that in the three commentaries on the *De Anima* there is no claim or reasoned account supporting the immortality of the soul and that the analyses of the soul by Averroes in these works provide no grounds for holding for the soul's continuing existence in the afterlife. I then proceed to consider the views of Averroes on the soul and the afterlife in some religious and dialectical writings to set out the issues at stake. Finally, I conclude with the consideration of several possibilities for the conciliation of the very different statements of Averroes on the ontology of the soul in the demonstrative philosophical writings and the religious or dialectical writings examined in the present article.

1. The ontology of the soul in the commentaries on *De Anima*

Averroes wrote three commentaries on the *De Anima* of Aristotle. His *Short Commentary* or *Mukhtaṣar* was likely written ca. 1158–60 and has as its stated purpose the establishment on the basis of the accounts of the philosophers of what he considers to conform best with what has been explained in natural science and best fits with the purpose of Aristotle.⁸ It does not follow the order of Aristotle's book but rather consists of a series of essays starting with the substance of the soul and then proceeding to its powers of nutrition, sensation, sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, common sense, imagination, reason and appetite.

His *Middle Commentary* or *Talkhīṣ*, completed and made available before 1186, contains many texts identical to the *Long Commentary* or *Sharḥ* based on an earlier incomplete version of the *Long Commentary*.⁹ The *Middle Commentary* is a paraphrasing account of Aristotle's *De Anima* in three parts in accord with the traditional division of the Greek. However, the account of reason includes discussion which does not precisely correspond to the text of Aristotle, including a paragraph¹⁰ just before his paraphrase of *De Anima* 3.4 and 3.5 and a lengthy excursus¹¹ following 3.5. It is in these additional materials that Averroes rejects his account in the *Short Commentary* and sketches a new understanding of the power of reason and the human soul. The *Middle Commentary* has no preface indicating the purpose of the work, but it is generally assumed that the middle commentaries were composed at the request of the caliph, Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf, subsequent to introduction to the caliph by Ibn Ṭufayl.¹²

The *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, extant in Arabic only in fragments and the lone commentary on the soul by Averroes translated into Latin, is a lengthy work containing the complete *De Anima* of Aristotle with detailed commentary passage by passage. While Averroes himself says that this was completed in 1186 as the first of his long commentaries,¹³ it is unknown when he commenced the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*. Still, it has been established that an early version was the likely source for some identical texts found in the *Middle Commentary* and also found in an important Arabic manuscript written in Hebrew characters.¹⁴ The

version of the text represented by the Latin translation is generally taken to be Averroes's mature and final understanding of the soul and intellect since its new doctrine of soul and intellect is referred to in his late *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*¹⁵ and for other reasons.¹⁶ Like the *Middle Commentary*, the *Long Commentary on the De Anima* has no preface explaining the work's purpose and structure. However, unlike the *Middle Commentary*, the *Long Commentary* extends Book 2 to the end of the traditional 3.3 and starts Book 3 at *De Anima* 3.4, the beginning of the detailed account of intellect.

The teaching on the soul in all three of these philosophical commentaries depends on the same starting point of reasoning, namely, Aristotle's definition of soul crafted in *De Anima* 2.1 where Aristotle reaches the conclusion that the soul is the first actuality of a natural body having organs (412b5). In each commentary Averroes has to address the issue raised by Aristotle as to whether the intellect and the power of theoretical reasoning constitute a distinct kind of soul peculiar to human beings which may be separate, as what is immortal is separate from what is perishable (*De Anima* 2.2, 413b25–27). Aristotle himself questions the value of a universal definition of soul (*De Anima* 2.3, 414b20–28), apparently prompted by the problem of the power of theoretical reasoning (415a8–13). This is because Aristotle will contend in *De Anima* 3.4 that the intellect must have a receptivity but also be uncontaminated and unmixed with body — and so immaterial — in order that it can be the place of forms (429a13–30). He then goes on to state that intellect is separate (429b6) and simple (429b23 ff.) and to imply strongly that it is the immaterial subject for the understood forms (429b22, 429b 23–430a9) which Averroes will call intelligibles in act. For Averroes the different positions he takes in the three commentaries each hinges on consideration of just what is the nature of intelligibles in act and into what sort of subject they may be received.¹⁷

1.1. The Short Commentary on the De Anima

The power of imagination plays a very special role in Averroes's first commentary on the *De Anima*. First, for all animals it contributes to well being by playing an essential part of the process by which external reality is apprehended, a process involving impressions received by the external senses and affecting the common sense. From this there come about in the imaginative power intentions which are the perfection or realization of that power. Second, in the case of human beings alone, Averroes holds, the imaginative power plays a distinctively different and higher role insofar as the still particular forms or intentions that come to be in the individual human being's imagination become the subjects for intelligibles in act and so for the universal. For this Averroes reasoned that the human soul's power of imagination “is distinguished by the fact that it does not need an organic instrument for its activity.”¹⁸ This is because in this work Averroes conceives the material intellect, that is, the power receptive of the intelligibles in act in the soul that make possible human intellectual understanding, to exist in the individual human being as a disposition belonging to the forms in the human imagination.

Following Aristotle's account that expressly stated that the receptive and active powers of intellect must be “in the soul” (*De Anima* 3.5, 430a13–14), Averroes explained that “the material intellect, insofar as it is material, needs necessarily for its existence that there be here an intellect existing eternally in act,”¹⁹ scil. the Agent Intellect. The material intellect does not receive the intelligibles in potency found in the imagination as images subsequent to the reception of impressions on the external senses and the production of intentional forms by the common sense. Rather, these have to be raised from the mode of being of particulars intelligible in potency to the mode of being of intelligibles in act to be received in the material intellect. For this the separately existing Agent Intellect is required to be present in the human being as “form for us”²⁰ “uniting and conjoining”²¹ with the human soul to bring about the higher mode of being of intelligibles in act so that they could be received into the material intellect for intellectual understanding. In his own version of an account inspired in part by Ibn Bājjā and in part by Alexander of Aphrodisias,²² Averroes understood the term “material intellect” not to denote properly an intellect — since intellect as intellect is necessarily something in act and separate — but rather to

denote a receptive disposition (*isti'dād*) having as its subject the forms existing in the human imagination.²³ In this way the imagination — which Averroes thought not to be a wholly bodily power, at least in the case of human beings — is able to serve as substrate or foundation for a disposition which makes possible the understanding of intelligibles in act.²⁴ That is, the intellectual power existing in each understanding human being called “the material intellect” cannot literally be an intellect since an intellect as such is not a potency nor can it literally be material since matter receives an actuality only as a particular; hence, since it is a disposition actualized in human knowing, it remains for it to be attached to the forms of the imagination as a disposition by which human understanding takes place. Regarding this Averroes writes,

Since it has been made evident that these intelligibles are generated, it is necessary that there be a disposition which precedes them. And since the disposition is something which is not separate, it is necessary that it exist in a subject. It is not possible for this subject to be a body according to what has been made evident regarding these intelligibles not being material in the way in which bodily forms are material. It is also not possible that it be an intellect, since it is something in potency, for there is not anything in it in act of that for which it is a potency. Since this is so, then the subject for this disposition must be a soul. And there is nothing evident here closer to being the subject of these intelligibles among the powers of the soul than the forms of the imagination. Since it has been made evident that [the intelligibles] exist only as dependent on [the forms of the imagination] and that [the intelligibles] exist with [the forms of the imagination] and perish with their perishing, then the disposition which is in the forms of the imagination for receiving the intelligibles is the first material intellect.²⁵

In this analysis Averroes does not provide all the details and perhaps is not fully coherent, but he does point clearly to the consequence that the individual human soul is itself perishable on this account. For, while imagination is common to animals (and he says of human imagination that it “is distinguished by the fact that it does not need an organic instrument for its activity,” as noted earlier), it is nevertheless the case that the human imagination is a particular power belonging to the individual human being and is not separate immaterial intellect. To that extent, the power of imagination is as perishable as is the body of the human being to whom it belongs. And no argument for the immortality of the soul can be made through appeal to the immaterial reception of intelligibles in act into an essential power of the soul, since Averroes has said that the material intellect is not literally intellect but is rather a disposition of the forms in the imagination. Precisely how this account allows for human intellectual understanding Averroes does not fully explain in this work, something not surprising since, as we shall see, he rejects this account in his later *De Anima* commentaries. However, what is clear on this account is that the imagination is dependent upon the soul, which is an actuality of the body, and that it and also the disposition called “material intellect” dependent upon it, perish with the perishing of the human body. Hence, there is no provision or rational argumentation supportive of post-mortem existence of individual human beings in the *Short Commentary on the De Anima*.²⁶

1.2. The Middle Commentary on the De Anima

For the most part the *Middle Commentary* consists of a paraphrasing account of Aristotle's *De Anima*. Here Averroes sets forth a view of the Agent Intellect similar to that of the *Short Commentary* insofar as the constitution of the human intellect involves a composition of the individual human material intellect and the shared Agent Intellect with this latter coming to be “in” human beings as “form for us”.²⁷ It is through the intellectual abstractive power of the Agent Intellect that individual human beings are able to come to understand the worldly essences presented to the internal senses through sense perception.

It is clear that, in one respect, this intellect is an agent and, in another, it is form for us (*ṣūrah lanā*), since the generation of intelligibles is a product of our will. When we want to think something, we do so, our thinking it being nothing other than, first, bringing the intelligible forth

and, second, receiving it. The individual intentions in the imaginative faculty are they that stand in relation to the intellect as potential colors do to light. That is, this intellect renders them actual intelligibles after their having been intelligible in potentiality. It is clear, from the nature of this intellect — which, in one respect, is form for us (*ṣūrah la-nā*) and, in another, is the agent for the intelligibles — that it is separable and neither generable nor corruptible, for that which acts is always superior to that which is acted upon, and the principle is superior to the matter. The intelligent and intelligible aspects of this intellect are essentially the same thing, since it does not think anything external to its essence. There must be an Agent Intellect here, since that which actualizes the intellect has to be an intellect, the agent endowing only that which resembles what is in its substance.²⁸

This understanding takes place through the reception of intelligibles in act into the receptive material intellect. However, the conception of the material intellect in this work is very different from that of the *Short Commentary*.

Averroes provides a new analysis of the nature of the material intellect as a subject for intelligibles in act and of its relationship to the human soul in his account of rational power corresponding to *De Anima* 3.4–8. Disregarding the *Short Commentary*'s understanding of the material intellect as identified with a disposition of the forms in the imagination, Averroes insists that as intellect the material intellect “cannot be mixed with the subject in which it is found” since if that were so “the forms of things would not exist in the intellect as they really are — that is, the forms existing in the intellect would be changed into forms different from the actual forms. If, therefore, the nature of the intellect is to receive the forms of things which have retained their natures, it is necessary that it be a faculty unmixed with any form whatsoever.”²⁹ That is, the nature of intellectually understood intelligibles in act dictates that they be received into a subject that is unmixed with the body or powers of a body or any other form. Consequently, the material intellect cannot be a disposition of the forms of the imagination but must rather be immaterial intellect and yet also receptive. Averroes writes,

Both approaches to the material intellect have thus been explained to you — that of Alexander and that of the others — and it will have become clear to you that the truth, which is the approach of Aristotle, is a combination of both views, in the manner we have mentioned. For, by our position as stated, we are saved from positing something separate in its substance as a certain disposition, positing [instead] that the disposition found in it is not due to its [own] nature but due to its conjunction with a substance which has this disposition essentially — namely, man — while, in positing that something here is associated incidentally with this disposition, we are saved from [considering] the intellect in potentiality as a disposition only.³⁰

That is, the material intellect is not merely a disposition attached to the forms of the imagination but rather it is a disposition belonging to a human being who comes to be knowing through the actualization in being of that disposition by the abstractive power of the separate Agent Intellect.

But how is that attachment of an unmixed and immaterial power, the material intellect, to the human being to be conceived?

For his understanding of the relationship of the human being to the material intellect Averroes draws upon his understanding of celestial entities, namely, the bodies which the souls are “in” and the intellects which are the causes of the movement of the celestial bodies by their souls, as Marc Geoffroy has rightly pointed out.³¹ In the case of the eternal heavens the moving body and its soul are not composed hylomorphically as are transitory sublunar beings. Rather, the soul is “in” the celestial body without forming a single hylomorphic composite from the two, each of which is an eternal being. In the case of humans, the material intellect is not literally “in” the

body, the soul or the human composed of the two since the material intellect must remain unmixed to be receptive of intelligibles without distortion by pre-existing formalities. Hence, an individual material intellect belongs to and exists “in” the human soul. To this extent, the power of soul called material intellect has its existence and individuation through its relation to and association with the individual soul existing in the body. Although Averroes chooses not to draw the conclusion explicitly, it is clear the perishing of the composite of soul and body also entails the loss of individualization and existence for the associated material intellect. Hence, as was the case for the *Short Commentary*, here too in the *Middle Commentary* there is no provision or rational argumentation supportive of post-mortem existence of individual human beings. That is, in the *Middle Commentary on the De Anima* the ontology of the soul and its powers entails that the human soul and intellect perish with the death of the body.

1.3. The Long Commentary on the De Anima

Averroes again confronted the issue of the nature of intelligibles in act and the character of a subject suitable for them for the sake of human intellectual understanding in his last major work on the intellect, his *Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*. Critically reflecting on the teachings of Themistius in the latter's *Paraphrase of the De Anima*, Averroes brought his mind to bare a notion he had not dealt with at length in either of the two earlier commentaries, namely, the unity of knowledge that makes shared science and intersubjective intellectual discourse possible. In both of those works Averroes held that each human being possesses his or her own personal material intellect. In the *Long Commentary*, however, he adopts a view that he had explicitly rejected in the *Middle Commentary*³² and that he had raised as worthy of further consideration in a short work called *Epistle 1 on Conjunction*:³³ the Material Intellect as a single separate entity shared by all human beings. In forming this new understanding, Averroes found the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by Themistius a powerful stimulant.

In the Arabic text of Themistius Averroes read,

There need be no wonder that we all are as a group composites of what is in potency and of what is in act. All of us whose existence is by virtue of this one are referred back to a one which is the Agent Intellect. For if not this, then whence is it that we possess known sciences in a shared way? And whence is it that the understanding of the primary definitions and primary propositions is alike [for us all] without learning? For it is right that, if we do not have one intellect in which we all share, then we also do not have understanding of one another.³⁴

This unity of intellect for the sake of “understanding of one another” Averroes applied to his conception of human intellectual understanding to form his novel understanding of the unity of the Material Intellect, a view inspired by his reading of Themistius although not held by Themistius himself.³⁵ For Averroes this understanding of the Material Intellect satisfied the need for the unity of understanding on the part of distinct human individuals since this entity is the repository of abstracted intelligibles in act to which all particular acts of understanding and scientific discourse refer. This is possible only insofar as the nature of the Material Intellect is such that it is a unique reality constituting a distinct immaterial species so that intelligibles received are not particularized as they would be were it to be truly material. Averroes was well aware of the difficulty of asserting that something actual as immaterial intellect could be receptive, a notion he labeled as “the problem of Theophrastus.” Nevertheless, to solve the complex array of issues involved in accounting for the phenomenon of intellectual understanding on the part of transitory human beings, Averroes crafted this new account explicitly conscious of the metaphysical commitments entailed, something evident in his description of the material intellect as “a fourth kind of being” in addition to matter, form and matter-form composites.³⁶

With this new teaching Averroes held the familiar notion that individual human beings employ the external senses and the common sense to produce intentions in the imagination. These are then refined and stripped of

the extraneous by the cogitative power yielding denuded intentions placed in memory ready for transference from the mode of being of particulars to the mode of being of intelligibles in act.³⁷ This takes place thanks both to the presence of the separate Agent Intellect “in the soul” as “form for us” effecting the abstractive transference and to the presence of the Material Intellect “in the soul” as well as the immaterial subject receptive of the intelligible now no longer in potency as it was in the external and internal powers of the individual soul but instead in act. For the individual human knower this yields the theoretical intellect as a positive disposition of knowing (*al-‘aql bi-l-malaka, intellectus in habitu*) in the soul which accounts for the human experience of knowing the intelligibles in act which Averroes had reasoned could only exist in the Material Intellect, the shared immaterial subject of intelligibles. In this teaching the presence of the two separate intellects “in the soul” provides the connection between the individual knower's cogitative power responsible for human acts of will in making pre-noetic preparations for abstraction. The realization of knowledge in that individual as the theoretical intellect coordinates with abstracted intellectual content in the Material Intellect. In this way the individual human knower can be called the subject of truth insofar as the individual provides the content intelligible in potency which comes to exist as intelligible in act in the Material Intellect — the subject of the existence of the intelligible in act — by way of the abstractive and elevating power of the Agent Intellect.

The foregoing is important for the issue of the ontology of the soul since the philosophical reasoning must be focused on the natures of the intelligibles in act and natures of the subjects into which they are received. For Averroes human intellectual understanding comes about when the two separate substances, the Agent Intellect and the Material Intellect, are intrinsically present in the human soul by a form of sharing or participation. But the human soul is the first actuality of a natural body having organs, while the those intellects are separate from body. In light of this, Averroes determines that the term soul is equivocal and that intellect is not properly part of the essence of the human soul. Explaining his understanding of Aristotle, Averroes writes,

[I]t is better to say, and seems more to be true after investigation, that this is another kind of soul and, if it is called a soul, it will be so equivocally. If the disposition of intellect is such as this, then it must be possible for that alone of all the powers of soul to be separated from the body and not to be corrupted by [the body's] corruption, just as the eternal is separated. This will be the case since sometimes [the intellect] is not united with [the body] and sometimes it is united with it.³⁸

That is, for a human being soul is the actuality of body responsible for the formation of the hylomorphic composite. The rational part of soul or intellect is not properly soul as form of the body; it can be called soul but only in a wholly equivocal sense. Intellect then does not belong properly and per se to this hylomorphic composite in virtue of itself but rather is only shared through the presence of the Agent Intellect and the Material Intellect during the earthly life of the human individual. Hence, no argument for personal immortality can be based on the per se presence of an intellectual — and thereby immaterial — power of the soul fully intrinsic to each individual human. The consequence is that, while the Agent Intellect, the Material Intellect, and also the human species can be reasoned to be eternally in existence,³⁹ there is no basis in argument for a continued existence of the individual human soul after the death of the body. For Averroes in the *Long Commentary*, then, the ontology of the human soul does not entail any *post-mortem* existence for individual human beings.

In sum, Averroes has no provision for an afterlife for individual human beings or human souls in any of his three commentaries on the *De Anima*.

2. The Ontology of the Soul in *Faṣl al-maqāl* and *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*

In the *Faṣl al-maqāl*, Averroes boldly asserts that the denial of the existence of the afterlife is unbelief but adds that the learned thinker who commits error regarding this difficult question should be excused so long as the afterlife is not denied. Still, he then says,

For anyone not adept in science, it is obligatory to take [descriptions of the next life] in their apparent sense; for him, it is unbelief to interpret them because it leads to unbelief. That is why we are of the opinion that, for anyone among the people whose duty it is to have faith in the apparent sense, interpretation is unbelief because it leads to unbelief. Anyone adept in interpretation who divulges that to him calls him to unbelief; and one who calls to unbelief is an unbeliever.⁴⁰

He then adds later in the text of the *Faṣl al-maqāl*, “it is obligatory that interpretations be established only in books using demonstrations, because if they are in the books of demonstrations only one from among the people of demonstration will get their hands on them.”⁴¹ In this Averroes does not deny in an absolute way the possibility of an interpretation of the scriptural account of the afterlife which considers the doctrine in a non-literal way. Such an interpretation can only be permitted to the learned people of demonstration because of the likelihood that unbelief would ensue for the unlearned upon hearing of such a view.⁴²

A similar view is found in the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, as indicated earlier. There Averroes holds that religions are obligatory and that they “seek the instruction of the masses generally” in praiseworthy principles “which incite the masses to the performance of virtuous acts” since religion “is primarily concerned with the things in which the masses participate.”⁴³ Philosophers also regard religions to be obligatory “since they lead toward wisdom in a way universal to all human beings.” Nevertheless, the philosophers hold the complete happiness attainable by human beings is possible for philosophers only thanks to “participation with the class of the masses,” no doubt simply because of the needs that must be met for the full attainment of the philosophical life. Religion, he writes, through its “actions and regulations” as well as “the prayers in our religion hold men back from ignominy and wickedness,” gives rise to “the existence of virtues which are realized through moral action and through practice,” as the philosophers would put it. The religious doctrine of the afterlife is powerfully conducive to this virtuous conduct by the masses and does so through vivid imagery sufficient to move human beings to right action and moral conduct. “Thus to represent the beyond in material images is more appropriate than purely spiritual representation.”⁴⁴

However, while the issue of the afterlife functions in the realm of practical philosophy and right action since “the philosophers believe that religious laws are necessary political arts,”⁴⁵ nevertheless “according to them it is a speculative problem (*min al-masā'il al-naẓariyya*).”⁴⁶ That is, the reality of the afterlife is not something proven in practical philosophy since the practical is about action and what ought to be done, while it belongs to the speculative, or, better, the theoretical sciences to establish by philosophical argumentation the existence of the afterlife. Here in the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* no such proof is provided even though the concern of this last section of the work is to reply to the accusation of al-Ghazali “that the philosophers deny bodily resurrection.”⁴⁷ Instead, the focus is not the issue of the existence of the afterlife but rather on the issue of denial; and the response affirms that the philosophers do not set out such a denial since it would undermine the creation of the virtuous society upon which depends the highest fulfillment of human existence available only to the philosophers, namely “full happiness.”

Both the *Faṣl al-maqāl* and the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* are dialectical works according to the scheme of classification provided in the former; in the latter he explicitly describes the work itself as non-demonstrative.⁴⁸ And even if the former is in some sense both a dialectical religious treatise with an underlying philosophical foundation and argument,⁴⁹ still neither work contains a philosophical proof for the immortality of soul or the existence of an afterlife. Rather, each stresses the practical value for the masses and for the philosopher of maintaining the

doctrine as part of a complex of religious beliefs essential for societal order and virtue. Nevertheless, the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* hints at the possibility of another account in theoretical philosophy and the *Faṣl al-maqāl* explicitly states that the issue is something over which there is disagreement. That theoretical account is recounted in detail earlier in this article. But in the *Faṣl al-maqāl* Averroes curiously raises the question of the doctrine of the afterlife as likeness and image.

After insisting that indications of God's existence, the reality of prophetic missions and “happiness in the hereafter and misery in the hereafter” must be known and affirmed by all levels of people, the rhetorical, dialectical and demonstrative,⁵⁰ Averroes goes on to speak of hidden things “known only by demonstration” and the apparent sense and the inner sense of scripture. He writes,

God has been gracious to His servants for whom there is no path by means of demonstration — either due to their innate dispositions, their habits, or their lack of facilities for education — by coining for them likenesses and similarities of these [hidden things] and calling them to assent by means of those likenesses, since it is possible for assent to those likenesses to come about by means of the indications shared by all — I mean, the dialectical and the rhetorical. This is the reason for the Law being divided into an apparent sense and an inner sense. For the apparent sense [of the Law] is those likenesses coined for those meanings, and the inner sense is those meanings that reveal themselves only to those adept in demonstration.⁵¹

That is, there are interpretations available only to adepts of demonstration, the philosophers, while for the other two groups revelation has provided “likenesses and similarities” of the true understanding. Of those others who assent in the absence of demonstration, some use imagination at the level of a belief in corporeality (*jismiyya*) while others rise a bit higher to the thinking of God as being in a place. The same would seem to hold of the afterlife in their restricted understandings. And in fact there may even be disagreement among the philosophers since their intellectual abilities in demonstration may vary in rank. For Averroes, “With respect to this question [of the next life and its conditions], it is an evident matter that they belong to the sort about which there is disagreement.”⁵² Yet, even in the *Faṣl al-maqāl* he is unwilling to leave this as a matter of disagreement and uncertainty. He writes, as indicated earlier, “it is obligatory that interpretations be established only in books using demonstrations.”⁵³

3. Conclusion

As indicated immediately above, Averroes clearly states in his *Faṣl al-maqāl* that human beings who are only capable of assent to teachings on the basis of rhetorical or dialectical means must rely on inferior modes of understanding dominated by corporeality and imagination. Those modes provide likenesses and similarities but not true understanding of their object, the truth and reality of what is depicted in the religious teaching on resurrection and the afterlife. That truth and reality is not to be found in his dialectical *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* either. Rather, it is to be found, writes Averroes, in the “books using demonstrations,” a view stated in both the *Faṣl al-maqāl* and the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*. This indicates, then, that the truth of the issue is to be found in his philosophical commentaries such as those on *De Anima* examined earlier.⁵⁴ Yet, as we have seen, those commentaries contain no such demonstration and in fact contain teachings entailing the complete corruption of the human being without any provision for or entailment of an additional or continuing existence of any sort after death. How can these explicit albeit very different teachings be understood coherently?

One seemingly possible way to understand the view of Averroes might be to hold that he believed the religious doctrine of the afterlife simply on faith without demonstrative proof. Certainly he repeatedly insists that this is a principle of religion that all must affirm regardless of varying abilities of the rhetorical, dialectical or demonstrative classifications of human beings. If there is any absolute proof of the afterlife, that proof could in

principle only be found in the demonstrative works of Averroes. But given that no such proof is found in those works, one might conclude that the lack of proof is just a matter of the imperfection of human reasoning abilities to provide the needed arguments. Yet that is unacceptable, since it does not reflect the explicit reasoned analyses in the demonstrative works of philosophical psychology by Averroes, for his accounts there are not aporetic but rather in their reasoning they entail the conclusion that human beings perish wholly at death. Recall that the *Short Commentary* held for the material intellect to be in the forms of the imagination and thereby dependent upon imagination which is perishable; the *Middle Commentary* held the material intellect to be dependent for its existence and individuation on the human person to which it belongs; and the *Long Commentary* held only the separate Agent Intellect and the separate Material Intellect to exist imperishably, not the human individual.

A different possibility — but one equally unacceptable — would be to say that Averroes held the reasoning of the so-called demonstrative works of psychology to yield true conclusions. Hence, the view of Averroes would be that the human soul is perishable and there is no afterlife. This would seem then to require full dissimulation on his part, particularly in his statement in the *Faṣl al-maqāl* where he affirmed the absolute character and necessity that understanding of certain principles of religion are “possible for everyone,” that is, possible for all human beings, humans at all three of the levels of understanding or modes of assent. The three examples which he provides are God's existence, that of prophetic missions, and happiness and misery in the afterlife. He then writes,

That is because the three sorts of indications due to which no one is exempted from assenting to what he is responsible for being cognizant of — I mean, the rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative indications — lead to these three roots.⁵⁵

Neither of these possibilities is acceptable on its face. The affirmation of the afterlife in the dialectical religious works and the denial of the afterlife found in those philosophical conclusions are contradictory and impossible. In light of that other possibilities may be suggested. Perhaps in this matter Averroes lived with full psychological cognitive dissonance on the matter of the afterlife, both affirming it and denying it. Like the other two possibilities this too seems beyond the acceptable since it would involve a profound acceptance of a theory of double truth, something which he clearly and explicitly rejected in the *Faṣl al-maqāl*, the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, and in his *Middle Commentary on the Prior Analytics* with the affirmation of the unity of truth: “Truth does not contradict truth but rather is consistent with it and bears witness to it,” a near quotation from Book One, Chapter 32, of the Arabic version of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*, as I have shown elsewhere.⁵⁶

In the *Faṣl al-maqāl* Averroes asserts the necessity of holding for the existence of the afterlife on the part of the philosophers as well as on the part of those of the rhetorical and dialectical groupings, as indicated above. But in that same work he provides precisely the methodology required for the resolution of the present issue.

In the initial pages of the *Faṣl al-maqāl* Averroes quickly establishes that the Religious Law calls human beings to reflection (*naẓar*) on existing things as indications of their Artisan, God. That reflection (*i'tibār*) by means of syllogistic (*qiyās*) which is both religiously and intellectually grounded is reasoned to take place through the most perfect (*atamm*) sort of syllogistic, namely demonstration (*burhān*). Here Aristotelian demonstration differs from the other methods for generating assent — the emotive persuasion of rhetoric and assumption-based reasoning of dialectic — in that it causes assent to what is true per se and in virtue of itself, and not per accidens as is the case for the other methods of assent. Averroes then sets out the principle of the unity of truth to forestall any possibility of a doctrine of double truths, one for religion and one for demonstrative philosophical reasoning: “demonstrative reflection does not lead to differing with what is set down in the Law. Truth does not contradict truth but rather is consistent with it and bears witness to it.”⁵⁷ As a consequence,

when considering the possibility of a case in which the apparent sense of Religious Law regarding some matter differs from a philosophically demonstrated conclusion about that matter, Averroes clearly asserts the primacy of the demonstrated conclusion with the result that the apparent sense of the Religious Law must be interpreted in another, non-literal way. He writes, “And we firmly affirm that, whenever demonstration leads to something differing from the apparent sense of the Law, that apparent sense admits of interpretation according to the rules of interpretation in Arabic.”⁵⁸

This methodology carefully spelled out by Averroes in the *Faṣl al-maqāl* when applied to the issue of the afterlife in conjunction with the conclusions of the demonstrative accounts of the human soul found in Averroes's commentaries on the *De Anima* leads to a conclusion which Averroes never voiced explicitly in his religious or philosophical writings, namely, the denial of the afterlife. However, in the *Faṣl al-maqāl* after upholding the eternity of the world and the denial of God's knowledge of particulars as well as of universals in clearly and carefully reasoned ways in response to the charges of unbelief by al-Ghazālī, Averroes provides remarks on the issue of the afterlife which are far from clear in their meaning.

While detailed consideration of his response to al-Ghazālī regarding the charge of unbelief for the denial of resurrection and the afterlife is beyond the scope of this article, it is something I will take up on another occasion together with analysis of Averroes's understanding of the functions of language in philosophical and religious discourses.⁵⁹

References

- 1 For Averroes's rejection of “double truth,” see Richard C. Taylor, “‘Truth does not contradict truth’: Averroes and the Unity of Truth,” *Topoi* 19/1 (2000): 3–16.
- 2 Averroes. *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom & Epistle Dedicatory*, tr. Charles E. Butterworth. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2001). Hereafter *Faṣl al-maqāl*. My rendering of the title follows A. El Ghannouchi, “Distinction et relation des discours philosophique et religieux chez Ibn Rushd: *Faṣl al-maqāl* ou la double vérité,” in *Averroes (1126–1198) oder der Triumph des Rationalismus, Internationales Symposium anlässlich des 800. Todestages des islamischen Philosophen*, ed. R.G. Khoury (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002), 139–145; see 145.
- 3 Averroës. *Tahafot at-tahafot*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, S.J., ed. Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1930. English translation in *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, tr. Simon Van Den Bergh, tr., 2 vol. (London: Luzac and Co., 1930). Hereafter *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*.
- 4 *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 582; tr., 360. Also see *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 19, where interpretation is allowed for those adept at demonstration, and 21, where diversity of opinion and even error are allowed to the learned so long as the afterlife is not denied. Also see *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 583–86; tr., 361–62.
- 5 “All this is the theory of the philosophers on this problem and in the way we have stated it here with its proofs, it is a persuasive not a demonstrative statement. It is for you to inquire about these questions in the places where they are treated in the books of demonstration . . . Nothing therefore of what we have said in this book is a technical demonstrative proof; they are all non-technical statements, some of them having greater persuasion than others, and it is in this spirit that what we have written here must be understood.” *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 427–428; tr., 257–258. Translation slightly modified.
- 6 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 21.
- 7 Two early works are worthy of brief mention. (i) The *Commentary on the Parva Naturalia* by Averroes contains a teaching close to that of the *Short Commentary* and influenced by Ibn Bājjā. See *Abū al-Walīd Ibn Rushd. Talkhīs Kitāb al-Ḥiss wa-l-Maḥsūs*, Harry Blumberg (ed.) (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1972), 79–82; *Averroes. Epitome of Parva Naturalia. Translated from the Original Arabic and the Hebrew and Latin Versions*, Harry Blumberg (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1961), 46–48; *Averrois Cordubensis compendia librorum Aristotelis qui Parva Naturalia*

- vocantur*, A.L. Shields and H. Blumberg (eds.) (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1949), 109–115. (ii) *The Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction with the Active Intellect by Ibn Rushd with the Commentary of Moses Narboni. A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, Kalman P. Bland, ed. and trans. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1982) seems to be less mature and in a state of development. There he holds for a knowing conjunction of the human intellect with the Agent Intellect (52–53) and later speaks of a human being and “the attribute and form by which he is immortal” (103) but his teaching on the ontology of the soul is unclear. Averroes also complains that Ibn Bājja is difficult to understand (109).
- 8 *Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Nafs*, ed. A. F. El-Ahwani (Cairo: Imprimerie Misr, 1950), 2; *Epitome de Anima*, ed. S. Gómez Nogales (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto “Miguel Asín,” Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1985), 5; *La Psicología de Averroes. Comentario al Libro sobre el alma de Aristóteles*, tr. S. Gómez Nogales (Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 1987), 99.
- 9 See *Averroes (Ibn Rushd) of Cordoba. Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, tr. R. C. Taylor, Th.-A. Druart, subeditor (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xxix–xxxiii. Hereafter *Long Commentary*. Also see C. Sirat and M. Geoffroy, *L'original arabe du Grand Commentaire d'Averroes au De anima d'Aristote. Prémices d'édition* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2005); and R. Glasner, “Review of Averroes. Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima. A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation, Notes and Introduction, A. L. Ivry.” In *Aestimatio* 1 (2004): 57–61. Glasner's work established the date of the *Long Commentary on the De Anima* and that it was the first of the long commentaries.
- 10 *Averroes. Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima. A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation, Notes and Introduction*, ed. & tr. A. L. Ivry (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 109, (278). Hereafter *Middle Commentary*.
- 11 *Middle Commentary*, 110–112, (281–285).
- 12 *Middle Commentary*, xiv.
- 13 See Glasner cited in note 9.
- 14 See Sirat and Geoffroy cited in note 9; *Long Commentary*, xxviii–xxxiii; l–li.
- 15 *Long Commentary*, lii.
- 16 *Long Commentary*, l–li.
- 17 I also indicate the importance of these two considerations in “Intelligibles in act in Averroes,” in *Averroès et les averroïsmes juif et latin. Actes du colloque tenu à Paris, 16–18 juin 2005*, ed. J.-B. Brenet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 111–140; and “Themistius and the Development of Averroes' Noetics,” in *Soul and Mind. Medieval Perspectives on Aristotle's De Anima. Âme et Intellect. Perspectives antiques et médiévales sur le De Anima d'Aristote. Proceedings of the De Wulf-Mansion Centre Jubilee Conference (Louvain-la-Neuve — Leuven 14–17 February 2007)*, J.-M. Counet & R. L. Friedman, ed. (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming) (Philosophes Médiévaux, LII).
- 18 *Short Commentary* (1950), 74.9–10; (1985), 108.14–15; (1987), 197.
- 19 *Short Commentary* (1950), 88.14–16; (1985), 126.17–127.1; (1987), 212. In his *Short Commentary on the Parva Naturalia*, Averroes seems to set forth a similar doctrine. See *Averrois Cordubensis Compendia Librorum Aristotelis Qui Parva Naturalia Vocantur*, (1949), 109–110; *Averroes. Epitome of Parva Naturalia. Translated from the Original Arabic and the Hebrew and Latin Versions*, (1961), 46; *Abū al-Walīd Ibn Rushd. Talkhīṣ Kitāb al-Hiss wa-l-Maḥsūs*, (1972), 79.7–12.
- 20 *Short Commentary* (1950), 89.3–6; (1985), 127.7–10; (1987), 212.
- 21 *Short Commentary* (1950), 89.6–7; (1985), 127.10–11; (1987), 213.
- 22 See *Long Commentary*, introduction, xxv–xxviii.
- 23 *Short Commentary* (1950), 83.11–12; (1985), 120.13; (1987), 206.
- 24 *Short Commentary* (1950), 86.5–15; (1985), 124.1–10; (1987), 209.
- 25 *Short Commentary* (1950), 86.5–15; (1985), 124.1–10; (1987), 209.
- 26 For a more detailed analysis, see my forthcoming article cited in note 17.
- 27 *Middle Commentary*, 116 (297–8).
- 28 *Middle Commentary*, 116 (297).

- 29 *Middle Commentary*, 109 (278).
- 30 *Middle Commentary*, 112 (285). Note that I change Ivry's «substantively separate» for *mufāriqan fī jawharihi* to “separate in its substance.”
- 31 Averroès. *La Béatitude de l'âme. Éditions, traductions et études*, ed. & tr. M. Geoffroy and C. Steel (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2001), 64–65, 71 ff.
- 32 *Middle Commentary*, 111 (282).
- 33 Averroès. *La Béatitude de l'âme*, 210.
- 34 *An Arabic Translation of Themistius' Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, ed. M. C. Lyons (Columbia, South Carolina, and Oxford, England, 1973), 188.17–189.4. This Arabic text, based on an incomplete manuscript, is missing Greek 2–22 and some other passages. This corresponds to Themistius, *In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, ed. R. Heinze (Berlin, G. Reimer, Berlin, 1899) [*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, 5.3], 103.36–104.3. For an English translation of the Greek, see *Themistius, On Aristotle's On the Soul*, Todd, R. B., tr. (Ithaca, N.Y., 1996). Todd also translated selections from the Greek text in *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect*, Schroeder, F. M., and Todd, R. B., tr. (Toronto, 1990). Cf. Averroes, *Long Commentary*, 411–412; tr., 328–9.
- 35 For more detailed discussion of this see my forthcoming article cited in note 17.
- 36 *Long Commentary*, 409; tr. 326.
- 37 The intention “is transferred in its mode of being from one order into another.” *Long Commentary*, 439; tr. 351.
- 38 *Long Commentary*, 160–161; tr 128.
- 39 *Long Commentary*, 407; tr. 322.
- 40 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 21–22.
- 41 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 21–22.
- 42 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 21–22.
- 43 *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 582, tr. 360; 584, tr. 361; and 582, tr. 360.
- 44 *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 583–5; tr. 360–61.
- 45 *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 581; tr. 359.
- 46 *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 587; tr. 362.
- 47 *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, 580; tr. 359.
- 48 See note 5 above.
- 49 This is my contention indicated in “‘Truth does not contradict truth’: Averroes and the Unity of Truth,” *Topoi* 19.1 (2000): 3–16, and “Ibn Rushd / Averroes and ‘Islamic’ Rationalism,” in *Medieval Encounters. Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 15 (2009): 125–135.
- 50 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 18.
- 51 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 19.
- 52 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 20.
- 53 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 21.
- 54 The philosophical commentaries by Averroes are not merely derivative accounts of Aristotle's views. In the case of the first of his long commentaries, the *Long Commentary on the De Anima* (see n. 9 above), Averroes makes it clear that the views expressed are his own, particularly his unique interpretation of the *De Anima* which he considered to be a novel but accurate account of Aristotle. He writes, “Since there are all those things [which can be raised regarding the material intellect], for this reason it seemed [best] to me to write what seemed to me to be the case on this topic. If what appears to me is not complete, it will be a start for a complete account. So I ask my brothers seeing this exposition to write down their doubts and perhaps in that way what is true regarding this will be found out, if I have not yet found [it]. If I have found [it], as I suppose, then it will be clarified through those questions. For truth, as Aristotle says, is fitting and gives testimony to itself in every way.” *Long Commentary*, 399; tr. 315.
- 55 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 18.
- 56 See the article cited in note 1 above.
- 57 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 8–9. In the second sentence I replace the translation of Butterworth with my own.

58 *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 9.

59 That study will take into account one additional work, his treatise of *kalām*, *al-Kashf ‘an manāhij al-adilla fī‘aqā'id al-milla* (*The Explanation of the Sorts of Proofs in the Doctrines of Religion*). See Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf ‘an manāhij al-adillah fī‘aqā'id al-milla*, Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī, ed. Second edition (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdat al-‘Arabiyya, 2001). A recent English translation is available in *Faith and Reason in Islam. Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments*, tr. I. Najjar (Oxford: One World, 2001). I am glad to express my thanks to Prof. Luis X. López-Farjeat (Universidad Panamericana, Mexico City), Prof. Andrea Robiglio (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), and doctoral student Katja Krause (King's College London) for valuable suggestions for the improvement of this article. I also thank the editor for his suggestions and patience.