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ARABIC / ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY IN THOMAS AQUINAS'S
CONCEPTION OF THE BEATIFIC VISION IN
IV *SENT.*, D. 49, Q. 2, A. 1¹

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IT IS WELL KNOWN that philosophical texts and ideas, analyses and arguments, from the Arabic/Islamic philosophical tradition exercised influence upon the development of theological and philosophical thinking in Latin Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and beyond. But too often the positive aspects of this influence have been eclipsed by the emphasis modern scholars have put upon the writings of Latin theologians arguing against reasoning received in the works of Avicenna, Averroës, and others of the classical rationalist philosophical tradition in Islam.² Frequently that emphasis has had its own ideological ends, yielding results that have inappropriately led to the dismissal of the importance of the arguments and insights

¹ A draft of this paper was presented at the annual Spring conference sponsored by the *Commissio Leonina* and the *Aquinas and 'the Arabs' Project*, "Thomas d'Aquin et ses sources arabes / Aquinas and 'the Arabs'" held at the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir 27-28 March 2009. I benefitted from comments and questions raised there and elsewhere I have presented drafts of this article. I also benefitted from the comments of an anonymous evaluator for *The Thomist*. This article is a product of the Aquinas and 'the Arabs' Project. For information see www.AquinasAndTheArabs.org.

² The Jewish rabbi, theologian, and philosopher Moses Maimonides, who wrote his famous *Guide for the Perplexed* in Arabic, was schooled in the Arabic / Islamic philosophical tradition and followed methods of philosophical analysis set forth by Al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Averroës and others of that tradition. To that extent, his philosophical work, although distinctive, can reasonably be included as part of the classical rationalist Arabic / Islamic philosophical tradition.

of Muslim and Jewish thinkers of the shared Abrahamic traditions of monotheism.³

Among the multiple purposes of the collaboration of the *Aquinas and 'the Arabs' Project* and the *Commissio Leonina* are (1) the presentation of a sound and accurate understanding of the value of the contributions of thinkers from the Arabic / Islamic tradition to the development of the theology and philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and other thinkers of his era and later in Europe; and (2) the proper appreciation and clear articulation of insights, concerns, and issues common among medieval thinkers of the Abrahamic traditions.⁴ This paper highlights and explicates an important contribution of the Arabic / Islamic philosophical tradition to the theology of Aquinas. At the very heart of his theology of the ultimate end of human existence in the beatific vision or seeing God's face—expressed by Aquinas as seeing God “face-to-face” or seeing him “in essence” (*facie ad faciem* or *per essentiam*)⁵—in his earliest major theological work, the *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*,⁶ Aquinas chose

³ I have particularly in mind here, for example, the polemical treatment of the development of metaphysics in the Arabic / Islamic tradition found in Etienne Gilson's *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949).

⁴ For details on this project, see www.AquinasAndTheArabs.org. Although thinkers of the Arabic tradition were of various ethnic backgrounds, Aquinas often speaks of them as ‘the Arab philosophers’ or ‘the Arabs.’ The Aquinas and ‘the Arabs’ Project collaborates with the *Commissio Leonina* and holds two research conferences annually, in the Fall in North America and in the Spring in Europe. For information, see www.AquinasAndTheArabs.org and click on Research Seminar Conferences.

⁵ While it seems clear enough in the objections and *contras* of the article treated here that Aquinas regards these as synonymous phrases, he makes this perfectly clear in his own voice in the response to objection 16 [22739]: “Set Deus per essentiam suam coniungibilis est intellectui. Vnde non immediate uideretur, nisi essentia sua coniungeretur intellectui. Et hec uisio immediata dicitur uisio faciei” (“But God is able to be joined to the intellect in essence. Hence, he would not be seen immediately unless his essence were conjoined to the intellect; this unmediated vision is called vision of the face”).

⁶ This work was written in the period of 1251/52-1256. The best editions are S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, t. 1, ed. P. Mandonnet (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929); S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, t. 2, ed. P. Mandonnet (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929); S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, t. 3, ed. M. F. Moos (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1956); S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, t.

to draw upon the philosophers of the Arabic tradition in his explication of the nature of the key Christian theological issue of ultimate human happiness in the life to come.⁷

While the role played by the philosophers of the Arabic tradition is evident in the formation of the thought of Aquinas on

4, ed. M. F. Moos (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1947); and Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera omnia*, t. 7/2, *Commentum in quartum librum Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi* (Parma; Typis Petri Fiacadori, 1858). Also see A. Oliva, *Les débuts de l'enseignement de Thomas d'Aquin et sa conception de la "sacra doctrina"*. Édition du prologue de son "Commentaire des Sentences" de Pierre Lombard., Bibliothèque Thomiste 58 (Paris: J. Vrin, 2006), 303-40; and P. M. Gils "Textes inédits de st. Thomas: Les premières rédactions du 'Scriptum super tertio Sententiarum'," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 45 (1961): 201-28; 46 (1962): 445-62, 609-28. The edition of the *Sentences* in the four volumes by Mandonnet and Moos is incomplete since it does not include the second half of Book IV. For this final portion of the work one would normally consult the Parma edition. However, the text is included in the edition of the *Summa Theologiae* published in Ottawa (1943), v. 5, pp. 446b-454a as Supplementum, q. 92, a. 1. I am grateful to Dr. Adriano Oliva, O.P., of the *Commissio Leonina*, for providing a superior unpublished provisional text of this article from the fourth book of the *Commentary on the Sentences*, a work which is not yet critically edited. Readers should note that, since I am using an unpublished version of the text, I will indicate sections of this article with the square bracketed text numbers provided in the online version of the *Scriptum super Sententiis* provided by Enrique Alarcón at <http://www.corpusthomicum.org/snp40492.html>. My text, however, on occasion differs from that online version. My quotations of the Latin of that article are from the superior unpublished version.

⁷ In saying this I merely echo what has been stated by J.-P. Torrell, O.P., regarding the importance of this issue in his study, "La vision de Dieu 'per essentiam' selon Saint Thomas d'Aquin," *View and Vision in the Middle Ages - Micrologus. Nature. Science and Medieval Societies V* (Florence: Edizioni SISMEI-II Galluzzo, 1997), 43-68; reprinted in J.-P. Torrell, O.P., *Recherches Thomasiennes. Études revues et augmentées* (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 177-97: "En réalité, la vision de Dieu est au coeur de sa théologie et il en traite comme du ressort même de la vie chrétienne" ("In reality the vision of God is at the heart of his theology and he treats it as falling within the Christian life" [196]). In a valuable 2006 study of *IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1, J.-B. Brenet offers similar remarks in an analysis more focused on philosophical issues. He writes, "Thomas place lui-même au coeur de sa conception de la vision béatifique la pièce centrale d'un dispositif noétique intégralement philosophique que, par ailleurs, il entend et prétend démonter et détruire" ("Thomas himself places at the heart of his conception of the beatific vision as centerpiece a noetic system integrally philosophical that, nevertheless, he understands and claims to demonstrate and destroy") ("Vision béatifique et séparation de l'intellect au début du XIVe siècle: Pour Averroès or contre Thomas d'Aquin?" in *Les sectateurs Averrois: Noétique et cosmologie aux XIIIe – XIVe siècles*, ed. Dragos Calma and Emanuele Coccia, *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 53 [2006]: 310-42, at 329). Brenet's work is in part prompted by Charles J. Ermatinger's article, "Giles of Rome and Anthony of Parma in an Anonymous Question on the Intellect," *Manuscripta* 17 (1973): 91-115.

the beatific vision, for Aquinas this issue is first and foremost a theological issue arising from various accounts of the accessibility or inaccessibility of the “face” of God to human beings *in patria*, that is, in the next life in heaven. In this article of his *Commentary on the Sentences* we find Aquinas composing his analysis in the aftermath of the condemnations of 1241 when William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris, condemned the proposition that the divine essence cannot be seen by angels or human beings.⁸ Aquinas follows this guidance and rejects a view inspired by the Neoplatonism of Dionysius and John Scot Eriugena, an understanding more common in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, that the divine nature itself is ultimately hidden from creaturely view and essentially transcends human experience.⁹ Although we shall see Aquinas mention Avicenna only briefly, earlier theologians had used the best philosophical science of their day, the philosophy of Avicenna, to reason that the divine essence itself is beyond direct human vision.¹⁰ In contrast, Aquinas insists that the scriptural account asserting the direct intellectual vision of God be taken as true and not subject to any interpretive diminution or watering down as allegorical, symbolic, and so forth.¹¹ Furthermore, while fully recognizing that for Western Christianity this is a tenet of faith, Aquinas still insists that its meaning can be cogently, rationally, and coherently explicated through use of the philosophical sciences of metaphysics and rational psychology. In this there are two things to note regarding his methodic use of philosophy in theological reasoning. First, here we find Aquinas clearly using philosophical reasoning from the Arabic tradition to refute a theological teaching condemned in 1241 which he believed to be incorrect, in this case the doctrine held by some

⁸ Torrell, “La vision de Dieu ‘per essentiam,’” 178.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 178-80.

¹⁰ See the fine account by P.-M. de Contenson in “S. Thomas et l’avicennisme latin,” in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 43 (1959): 3-31; and “Avicennisme latin et vision de Dieu au début du xiii^e siècle,” *Archives d’histoire littéraire et doctrinale du Moyen Âge* 34 (1959): 29-97. In the latter article (at 49-51) de Contenson also discusses the role of David of Dinant in the controversy leading up to the condemnation of 1210.

¹¹ See Torrell, “La vision de Dieu ‘per essentiam,’” 178-79 on the contradictory passages of Scripture on this issue.

who deny that human beatitude can consist in the veritable knowing of the divine essence. In this way he makes it clear that philosophical methods have a place in the evaluation of theological reasoning. Second, we also find that in his theology Aquinas unhesitatingly employs philosophical argumentation from the Arabic tradition of philosophy and from that tradition extracts the very principal key to his explication of human beatitude in the intellectual apprehension and understanding of the essence of God, the intellectual vision of God “face-to-face.”

This is obviously remarkable for the understanding of the truly essential importance of philosophy in the formation of theological doctrine.¹² But it is perhaps even more remarkable and worthy of special note that the solution of the issues at stake here Aquinas found only through his careful study of the thought of the philosopher and Muslim jurist Averroës in the *Long Commentary on De Anima*.¹³ There Averroës set forth his controversial doctrine that intellectual understanding on the part of individual human beings comes about only by means of separately existing immaterial intellects, the Agent Intellect and the Material Intellect. On the account of Averroës, these separate intellects come to be “in the soul” in human beings with the Agent Intellect as that by which human beings themselves perform the intellectual operation of separation or abstraction and with the Material Intellect as that which receives the abstraction now as an intelligible in act. It is in virtue of these operations that human beings are denominated rational animals.¹⁴ Yet it is also the case that Aquinas famously

¹² As Brenet remarks, this is quite contrary to the view of Gilson that philosophical progress took place thanks to the richness of theological considerations in the thought of Aquinas. See Brenet, “Vision béatifique et séparation de l’intellect,” 342.

¹³ On the importance of Averroës in this issue, see de Contenson, “S. Thomas et l’avicennisme latin,” 26-28; Ed. H. Wéber, “Les apports positifs de la noétique d’Ibn Rushd à celle de Thomas d’Aquin,” in *Multiple Averroës. Actes du colloque internationale organisé à l’occasion du 850e anniversaire de la naissance d’Averroës*, Paris 20-23 septembre 1976 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978) 211-48, in particular 212-19; and J.-B. Brenet, “S’unir à l’intellect, voir Dieu: Averroës et la doctrine de al jonction au coeur du thomisme,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 21 (2011): 215-47.

¹⁴ This is discussed in detail in my article, “Themistius and the Development of Averroës’ Noetics,” in *Medieval Perspectives on Aristotle’s De Anima*, ed. R. L. Friedman and J.-M. Counet, *Philosophes Médiévaux LVIII* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 1-38. It is also discussed in

rejects the doctrine of Averroës on the nature of human intellect with detailed analyses found in later works, most notably in his *De unitate intellectus contra averroistas*, but also even at book 2, distinction 17, question 2, article 1, of his *Commentary on the Sentences*. How could Aquinas in this same work both accept from Averroës the model and analysis essential to his doctrine of the human vision of God *per essentiam* and reject the account of natural epistemology of Averroës from which that model was taken? This will require explanation.

My focus here is on the critical consideration that Aquinas gives to teachings of philosophers from the Arabic tradition as providing possible models for understanding how a separate substance, in this case God, can be a proper object of knowledge on the part of human beings in ultimate human beatitude or happiness in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, book 4, distinction 49, question 2, article 1, “Whether the human intellect is able to attain to the vision of God in his essence.”¹⁵

In what follows, I first provide (1) an explanation of what it meant for the thinkers examined here to speak of knowing separate substances. I then proceed to an analysis of the text of Aquinas. This analysis is divided into two parts. (2) The first part concerns models from the Arabic tradition rejected by Aquinas, namely (2A) the models provided by the tenth-century Baghdad philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 950) and the twelfth-century Andalusian philosopher Ibn Bājja / Avempace (d. 1139), and (2B) the model provided by Ibn Sīnā / Avicenna (d. 1037). I then proceed to (3) Aquinas’s account of Alexander of Aphrodisias (d. early 3d century) and Ibn Rushd / Averroës (d. 1198). It is part of this latter account of Alexander and Averroës that is embraced by Aquinas

my “Intellect as Intrinsic Formal Cause in the Soul according to Aquinas and Averroës,” in *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections on Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions*, ed. Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth and John M. Dillon (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 187-220 and in the introduction to the English translation of the *Long Commentary on the De Anima*. For the latter, see *Averroës (Ibn Rushd) of Cordoba. Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, trans. and intro. Richard C. Taylor, subeditor Therese-Anne Druart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), lxvi-lxxv.

¹⁵ A full English translation of this text is available at http://academic.mu.edu/taylorr/Aquinas_and_the_Arabs_Project_Translations/Welcome.html

in his first detailed explication of the nature of the beatific vision, of the scriptural notion of ultimate human happiness consisting of the vision of God “face-to-face” or “in his essence,” *per essentiam*. In the course of my setting forth the analysis of Aquinas, it will become clear that the accounts he gives of al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, Alexander, and Averroës came solely from his study of the *Long Commentary on De Anima of Aristotle* by Averroës. Aquinas’s exposition of the model provided by Avicenna was available to him in the works of Avicenna.¹⁶ Finally, I will provide (4) a summary and a response to the question of how Aquinas could both accept the model of Alexander and Averroës for his supernatural epistemology of beatitude *in patria* and at the same time reject that view for natural epistemology *in via*. I will conclude with remarks on the understanding and use of insights from the Arabic tradition by Aquinas as a manifestation of an ongoing project common to philosophical thinkers of the Abrahamic traditions in the Middle Ages.

I. KNOWING SEPARATE SUBSTANCES

What is meant by the notion of knowing separate substances in the Arabic tradition varies in details through all the accounts, but must be understood against the background of Platonic and Aristotelian thought. For Plato it meant knowledge by an apprehension on the part of the rational soul of transcendent and separately existing forms as the *ousiai* or essences formally imitated by things of the perceptible world of sensation.¹⁷ For Aristotle it meant the attainment of intellectual understanding of highest realities and ultimate causes as recounted in *Metaphysics* 1.1-2 (980a22-983a23). Reference to that account seems to be present in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7-8 (1177a12-1179a33), where Aristotle speaks of the highest of two forms of happiness achievable by human beings, the happiness of

¹⁶ Regarding the prominence of Avicenna in discussions of this issue, see the articles by de Contenson mentioned in note 10.

¹⁷ The classic account of this in Plato’s *Republic* begins at 475e in book 5 and extends through book 6.

theoretical contemplation and the happiness of the life of virtue. The nature of the transcendent immaterial entities known is indicated as immaterial in *Physics* 8 and is expressly explicated as divine substance eternally active in intellectual self-contemplation in *Metaphysics* 12. These two views are in a certain way combined in the Plotinian conception of transcendent *Nous* or Intellect as the entity containing all the forms, a notion conveyed to the Arabic tradition in the *Plotiniana Arabica* and in writings from the late Greek Neoplatonic tradition.¹⁸ The early Arabic philosophical tradition sometimes followed a late Greek tendency to find harmony between the views of Plato and Aristotle, and it is under this influence that al-Fārābī constructed his metaphysical account of emanation and intellection.¹⁹

A) *al-Fārābī*

Combining the Plotinian notion of a separate intellect full with forms and the Aristotelian notion of an unmixed and causative intellect in act (discussed in *De Anima* 3.5), al-Fārābī set forth a doctrine of Agent Intellect as the last in an emanative hierarchy reaching from the First Cause (God) to the sphere of the moon.²⁰ The understanding of intelligibles by the human intellect comes about through abstraction or extraction of the intelligible in potency from what has been provided by the external and internal senses of the individual human being. As al-Fārābī makes clear in several other works, human intellectual understanding takes place

¹⁸ On the *Plotiniana Arabica*, see Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the "Theology of Aristotle"* (London: Duckworth, 2002). For a short account, see Adamson's "The Theology of Aristotle," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2010 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/theology-aristotle/>.

¹⁹ Recently, Marwan Rashed has argued against the traditional attribution to al-Fārābī of the treatise *On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages*; see his "On the Authorship of the Treatise *On the Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two Sages* Attributed to al-Fārābī," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 19 (2009): 843-82.

²⁰ See for example chap. 3 of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *On the Perfect State (Mabadi' ara' ahl al-madina al-fāḍila)*, ed. and trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 100-104.

thanks to “something” (*shai’un mā*)²¹ that is a power of abstraction provided to the human soul by the Agent Intellect. With this power the individual human being by means of its own intellect is able to abstract or extract (*intaza’a*) or transfer (*naqala*) the intelligible from its mode of existence as individual in the particulars of sensory experience to the immaterial mode of existence appropriate for intellectual understanding. In al-Fārābī’s account, the human receptive intellectual power called “material intellect” in the Arabic tradition (following Alexander of Aphrodisias), or later called “possible intellect” by Aquinas, is responsible for the activity of abstraction insofar as the rational soul is made receptive of the intelligible as immaterial.²² When a human being through study and reasoning has garnered intelligibles in act for himself in this way, that human being is able to contemplate intellectually those intelligibles in himself as what al-Fārābī calls “acquired intellect” and as such begins to lose need for body and senses. When all the intelligibles have been amassed by the rational soul, the soul comes to fulfillment and realization of itself as an intellectual substance, no longer needing the body, and becomes like the Agent Intellect itself, rising to be near the level of the Agent Intellect.

²¹ *Alfarabi. Risalah fil-‘aql*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, S.J., 2d ed. (Beyrouth: Dar el-Machreq Sari, 1983), 12.7-9. Etienne Gilson recognized the important influence of al-Fārābī on the Latin tradition in his “Les sources greco-arabes de l’augustinisme avicennisant,” *Archive d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 4 (1929): 5-149, and published a Latin text of *De intellectu* (115-26). However, Aquinas shows no evidence of employing the twelfth-century translation of this text in the article studied here but instead seems wholly dependent on what he finds in Averroës. Furthermore, his teacher Albert the Great displays no knowledge of this work by al-Fārābī in his *De homine* (ca. 1245), a work in which Aquinas found a natural epistemology which he made his own. This latter issue was the topic of my presentation, “Albert the Great’s Account of Human Knowledge in his *De homine*: A Concoction Formed from the Writings of Avicenna and Averroës,” at the conference *Translation and Transformation: Albert, between Aquinas and ‘the Arabs’*, Institute of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 4-5 June 2012, which will appear in the conference proceedings. It is somewhat surprising that neither Aquinas in the *Commentary on the Sentences* nor Albert in *De homine* evidence direct use of al-Fārābī’s *De intellectu*.

²² On this, see my “Abstraction in al-Fārābī,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 80 (2006) 151-68. More precisely, for Aquinas abstraction is carried out by the combined work of the agent intellect acting and the possible intellect receiving, both of which are intrinsic to the human soul.

For al-Fārābī, then, knowing separate substances consists in knowing abstracted intelligibles, knowing the intellect of the rational soul, and also knowing the immaterial Agent Intellect insofar as it is both (1) the provider to human beings of a power by means of which abstraction is accomplished by human individuals and (2) the ultimate cause of all forms in the sublunar realm.²³ In its most transcendent form, intellectual understanding or knowing results in the individual human intellect or rational part of the soul being at or near the level of the Agent Intellect. Al-Fārābī even goes so far as to say that this is the real meaning of the religious notion of the afterlife.²⁴ However, he does not hold that knowledge of the Agent Intellect is a direct apprehension or epistemological conjoining. Aquinas gives no evidence of having read this in the teachings of al-Fārābī and the account of this doctrine in al-Fārābī by Averroës provides a different interpretation.

In the *Long Commentary on De Anima* Averroës reports a second, more radical view al-Fārābī is said to have held in his lost *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁵ On that reported account, knowing separate intelligibles is something beyond human abilities, though precisely what al-Fārābī meant cannot be determined with certainty through the available indirect sources.²⁶

²³ This is the account of the *Risalah fi'l-‘aql*, though al-Fārābī expresses different views in other works. See my “Abstraction in al-Fārābī,” 155-57 and the notes there for this doctrine in the *Mabadi’ ara’ abl al-madina al-fādila* and *al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*. The *Risalah fi'l-‘aql* is the work most relevant for the present discussion since it was a source used by Averroës in the development of the doctrine of abstraction that was adopted by Aquinas.

²⁴ *Risalah fi'l-‘aql*, 30.9-31.9. In *al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*, the Agent Intellect exercises care for human beings so that they may “reach the highest ranks of the perfection which they can attain, which is ultimate happiness. This comes to pass when the human being comes to the rank of the Agent Intellect” (*Al-Fārābī’s The Political Regime [al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya also known as the Treatise on the Principles of Beings]*, ed. Fauzi M. Najjar [Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964], 32).

²⁵ See *Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima Libros*, ed. F. S. Crawford (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1953), 433; Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 345-46. Hereafter, references to the *Long Commentary* will indicate the pages of the Latin edition by Crawford in { } brackets.

²⁶ On the source of this report, see Steven Harvey, “The Place of the Philosopher in the City according to Ibn Bājjah,” In *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi*, ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 199-233. For a recent account of these and related issues, see Phillipe Vallat, *Farabi et l’École d’Alexandrie: Des prémisses de la connaissance à la philosophie politique* (Paris:

B) *Ibn Bajja*

For Ibn Bājja knowing separate substance takes place after the rational soul has exercised its powers in various levels of intellectual abstraction and finally attained a conjunctive conjoining and uniting (*ittiṣāl*) with the transcendent Agent Intellect, a process ultimately derived from Plato's account of dialectical movement through ideas, in ideas, and to ideas in the discussion of the Divided Line in book 6 of the *Republic*.²⁷ Ibn Bajja maintains that human beings exercise powers of abstraction on various levels of normal human existence in the formation of notions more and more general, leading all the way up to the sciences. But these abstractions can capture no more than what is present in the imperfect individual forms which the human being experiences, since none of these forms have the fullness of the ideas they represent. To attain to the intelligible itself one must rise beyond the intermediary abstractions of the natural philosopher to the apprehension of the intelligible itself in the ultimate intellect: "A human being first has the spiritual form according to its various ranked kinds (*'alā marātibī-hā*); then through those he is in contact (*yattaṣilu*) with the intelligible; then through that intelligible he has contact with this ultimate intellect."²⁸ Subsequent to exercises of abstraction, then, the soul must become intellect and rise through the dialectic of ideas to the level of the Agent Intellect (or perhaps God) to achieve a unity with it. For Ibn Bājja, the end of human existence is the attainment

Vrin, 2004).

²⁷ See the edition of the *Treatise on the Conjunction of the Intellect with Man* in Ibn Bajja (Avempace), *La conduite de l' isolé et deux autres épîtres: Introduction, édition critique du texte arabes. traduction et commentaire*, ed. and trans. Charles Genequand (Paris: Vrin 2010) 194-96. This work is available in English translation in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, trans. Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 2007), 269-83. For some discussion, see Alexander Altmann, "Ibn Bajja on Man's Ultimate Felicity," in *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), 1:47-87.

²⁸ *Treatise on the Conjunction of the Intellect with Man*, 194. It seems that this should be contact with God, though this is not completely clear. Still, what he writes later on (*ibid.*, 195) about the contemplation of the intelligible itself in what is pure intellect being the end of life and highest happiness might support that view. Note that he mounts a substantial defense of a Platonic theory of forms against the critique of Aristotle (*ibid.*, 198ff.).

of unity with the Agent Intellect (or God) as the attainment of a level of divinity, and the means to this are the acts of intellectual development.

C) *Avicenna*

For Avicenna, who based his own variation of the emanative scheme on al-Fārābī's, the Agent Intellect is the cause of all the forms emanated to constitute the things of the world and the intelligibles known by human beings. For the rational soul, knowing consists in what Avicenna variously characterizes using the metaphors of conjoining (*ittiṣāl*) with the separate Agent Intellect or of emanation (*fayḍ*) received from the separate Agent Intellect in the apprehension of the intelligible forms of the world which exist primarily in that Agent Intellect.²⁹ According to the teachings of Avicenna himself, intellectual understanding takes place in a coinciding twofold process, beginning with the preparation of the soul for the reception of forms by means of the human abstractive process (*tajrīd*) crafting prenoetic forms from particular experiences garnered by the external and internal senses in the sublunar realm. When the soul is in this way suitably prepared or disposed, the intelligible form is then emanated from the Agent Intellect.

In this Avicenna combines the Aristotelian approach which finds the foundations of knowledge in the sensory apprehension of the forms of things with a Neoplatonic approach like that found in the *Plotiniana Arabica* which locates all intelligible essences in transcendent intellect.³⁰ The preparation of the soul is the

²⁹ Both metaphors are used by Avicenna in close proximity in *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text) Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*, ed. F. Rahman (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 235-36; *Avicenna Latinus. Liber De Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus IV-V*, ed. S. Van Riet (Louvain: Editions Orientalistes; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 127-28. For a general study of emanation in Avicenna, see Olga Lizzini, *Fluxus (fayḍ). Indagine sui fondamenti della metafisica e della fisica di Avicenna* (Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2011). However, Lizzini's focus is not primarily on epistemology and she provides only a modest account of it.

³⁰ See Cristina D'Ancona, "Degrees of Abstraction in Avicenna: How to Combine Aristotle's *De Anima* and the *Enneads*," in *Theories of Perception in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy* (Helsinki: Springer, 2008), 47-71.

particular human being's exercise of the external and internal senses in orienting the rational soul for its reception of intelligibles, which can only truly come from the Agent Intellect. However, we must keep in mind that for Avicenna emanation must be understood as a metaphor for a process he also describes as a conjoining to the Agent Intellect.³¹ In his view, the rational soul lacks intellectual memory, and so in each act of knowing the soul must receive the emanation or make a conjoining again with the Agent Intellect. In this context, knowing separate substances as scientific knowledge of forms separate from matter and particularity consists in connecting with the Agent Intellect to receive somehow an emanation of the intelligibles present in it. This fits well with Avicenna's rejection of Aristotle's view that knowledge involves an identity of knower and known and with his acceptance of a form of representationalism.³² For Avicenna the intelligibles that come to be in the human intellect are not the unique forms themselves in the Agent Intellect but representations of the forms that in some way share in or participate in a derivative way those forms in the Agent Intellect for the intelligible content they possess. Hence, as the forms constituting the world literally must emanate from the Agent Intellect, the intelligible forms too must emanate from the Agent Intellect to account for human intellectual understanding. As we shall see, Aquinas understood Avicenna in accord with the metaphor of emanation.

³¹ Precisely how to understand the noetics of human intellect in Avicenna is a matter of current controversy. What might be called the standard account is the emanationist view espoused by Aquinas in his reading of Avicenna; see Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). However, this has been challenged. See Dimitri Gutas, "Intuition and Thinking: The Evolving Structure of Avicenna's Epistemology," in *Aspects of Avicenna*, ed. Robert Wisnovsky (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001; reprinted from *Princeton Papers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 9), 1-38; Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Avicenna on Abstraction," in *ibid.*, 39-72; and the novel approach to the issue in Jon McGinnis in "Making Abstraction Less Abstract: The Logical, Psychological and Metaphysical Dimensions of Avicenna's Theory of Abstraction," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 80 (2006): 169-83.

³² *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text)*, book 5, ch. 6 (Rahman, ed., 239-41; [Latin] van Riet, ed., 134-38).

D) Alexander of Aphrodisias

For Alexander of Aphrodisias in *De intellectu*, knowing separate substance in intellectual understanding consists in the formal presence of the transcendent Agent Intellect (which he also identifies with God) in the perishable human soul for the apprehension of intelligibles and the apprehension of that presence.³³ In his paraphrase of *De Anima*, Alexander also says that the power of human intellectual understanding comes from outside, and is not a wholly intrinsic part of the human soul.³⁴ As we shall see, Averroës, the sole source of information on the view of Alexander for Aquinas on this issue (as discussed in the *Commentary on the Sentences*), finds in Alexander as well as in Themistius (who is not mentioned by Aquinas in this regard) the doctrine of the formal presence of the Agent Intellect in the knowing human soul.

E) Averroës

From the time of his early *Short Commentary on De Anima* (early 1160s) through the writing of the *Middle Commentary*

³³ “This then [is what] the potential intellect, when it is being perfected and has developed, thinks. For just as the power of walking, which a human being has as soon as he comes to be, is led to actuality, as time advances, by being perfected itself and not by being affected in some way, in the same way the [potential] intellect too when it has been perfected both thinks the things that are intelligible by nature and makes sensible things intelligible to itself, as being productive” (Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima liber cum mantissa*, ed. Ivo Bruns, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, suppl. 2, pt. 1 [Berlin, 1887], 110.30-111.2; *Alexander of Aphrodisias: Supplement to On the Soul*, trans. R. W. Sharples [London: Duckworth, 2004], 34-35). “The intellect that is by nature and from without will assist that in us, because other things too would not be intelligible, though being [so] potentially, if there did not exist something that was intelligible by its own peculiar nature. This, being intelligible by its own nature, by being thought comes to be in the one who thinks; it is intellect that has come to be in the one who thinks, and it is thought ‘from without’ and [is] immortal, and implants in the material [intellect] a disposition such that it thinks the things that are intelligible potentially” (Bruns, ed., 111.28-32; Sharples, trans., 36-37).

³⁴ Alexander, *De Anima liber cum mantissa* (Bruns, ed., 90.20-91.4); *Alexandre d’Aphrodise. De l’Âme*, trans. Martin Bergeron and Richard Dufour (Paris: Vrin, 2008), 213; *The De Anima of Alexander of Aphrodisias: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. Athanasios P. Fotinus (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), 119-20.

(perhaps ca. 1180-83) and right up through to the completion of the final version of the *Long Commentary* (perhaps 1186) each of which went through various states of revision,³⁵ Averroës consistently held that the transcendent Agent Intellect plays an important part in the realization of intellectual understanding on the part of human beings, a view common to the Greek and Arabic traditions. In all three works Averroës characterizes this role as one in which Agent Intellect is *ṣurah la-nā*, “form for us.”³⁶ Such a characterization in a general way is certainly appropriate, since the tradition held commonly that a transcendent Agent Intellect plays a role in the actualization of the formal content of intelligibles in the human mind. In his *Long Commentary on De Anima* Averroës saw this doctrine of the Agent Intellect as “form for us” in Alexander of Aphrodisias who held that perishable individual human intellects are brought to completion in knowing by the transcendent Agent Intellect, which Alexander identified with the highest God.³⁷ Averroës analyzed the teachings of Themistius and also found that this Greek commentator as well holds that the transcendent Agent Intellect is “form for us.”³⁸ However, the true meaning of the teaching becomes clear when Averroës provides a critical analysis of the account of al-Fārābī.

As indicated earlier, for al-Fārābī the Agent Intellect plays a crucial role in human intellectual understanding and in the

³⁵ On this matter, see Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, 265-82; C. Sirat and M. Geoffroy, *L'original arabe du Grand commentaire d'Averroès au De anima d'Aristote. Prémices d'édition* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2005); my introduction in Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, xxviii-xlii; and my “Textual and Philosophical Issues in Averroës’ *Long Commentary* on the *De Anima* of Aristotle,” in *The Letter before the Spirit: The Importance of Text Editions for the Study of the Reception of Aristotle*, ed. Aafke M. I. van Oppenraaij and Resianne Smidt van Gelder-Fontaine (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 267-87.

³⁶ See Richard C. Taylor, “The Agent Intellect as ‘Form for Us’ and Averroës’s Critique of al-Fārābī,” *Topicos* (Universidad Panamericana, Mexico City) 29 (2005): 29-51; reprinted with corrections in *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics* 5 (2005): 18-32 (<http://www.fordham.edu/gsas/phil/klima/SMLM/PSMLM5/PSMLM5.pdf>). See also Marc Geoffroy, “Averroës sur l’intellect comme cause agent et cause formelle, et la question de la ‘jonction’ - I,” in *Averroës et les averroïsmes juif et latin. Actes du colloque tenu à Paris, 16-18 juin 2005*, ed. J.-B. Brenet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 77-110.

³⁷ Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 385-87 {484-485}.

³⁸ Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 356 {445}.

perfection of human substance at the highest levels by providing “something” by means of which the human intellect is able to perform the activity of abstraction or transference of intelligibles from the level of intelligibles in potency in the human imagination to the level of intelligibles in act in the individual human material or receptive intellect.

However, according to Averroës the teaching of al-Fārābī was that Agent Intellect is only an extrinsic efficient cause acting on humans in such a way as to make possible abstraction and intellectual understanding.³⁹ The individual human being is not the acting efficient cause in human intellectual understanding. As Averroës puts it, the Agent Intellect’s “relation to a human being will be only the relation of the agent to the human being, not a relation of form.”⁴⁰ That is, it will be the Agent Intellect that abstracts intelligible forms for the human intellect; this process does not take place through an intrinsic formal cause in the individual human intellect. The reason for Averroës’ rejection of this view is simply that he insists that the active power of intellectual understanding must be “in the soul” (as Aristotle himself insists in *De Anima* 3.4.430a13: *en tē psuchē*) and that it must be present there as “form for us” or a form belonging to human beings by means of which human beings perform the activities of abstraction and intellectual understanding. If the Agent Intellect does the abstracting, or provides forms through emanation from itself, the human individual is not an agent willing and acting in the formation of knowledge. For Averroës, this means, according to his novel doctrine, that the separately existing Agent Intellect and separately existing Material Intellect must come to be present as “in the soul” and must come to be powers formally belonging to the human being who initiates and carries out the operations of abstraction and receptive intellectual understanding. In an analysis of this elsewhere I have characterized it as a form of participation with the term,

³⁹ I discuss the views of al-Fārābī in various works in “Abstraction in al-Fārābī.”

⁴⁰ Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 401 {502}. Averroës understands the account of al-Fārābī differently from the one I gave earlier of the “something” which the Agent Intellect provides to the soul for carrying out abstraction.

“Aristotelian participation.”⁴¹ Key to this is the following assertion by Averroës:

For because that in virtue of which something carries out its proper activity is the form, while we carry out {500} our proper activity in virtue of the agent intellect, it is necessary that the agent intellect be *form in us*. . . [I]t is necessary that a human being understand all the intelligibles through the intellect proper to him and that he carry out the activity proper to him in regard to all beings, just as he understands by his proper intellection all the beings through the intellect in a positive disposition [*intellectus in habitu*], when it has been conjoined with forms of the imagination.⁴²

Here Averroës criticizes al-Fārābī and asserts that one must hold not that the Agent Intellect is an efficient cause acting on us, but that it is “form for us” acting intrinsically in us since we are ourselves knowers by our voluntary actions.⁴³

Averroës himself then clearly holds that the Agent Intellect must be “form for us” such that it is somehow not merely extrinsic but in some genuine sense intrinsically present in human knowers. For him, the Agent Intellect is (1) “form for us,” as (2) intrinsic to the human soul, and yet also (3) ontologically distinct in its own eternal existence. Further, the Agent Intellect is (4) available to us to be put in use by our will.⁴⁴ Elsewhere I have argued that this issue can be resolved if Averroës is understood to frame his understanding in light of his study of Themistius and notions from the Neoplatonic tradition found in Themistius.⁴⁵ In his *Paraphrase*

⁴¹ See Taylor, “Themistius and the Development of Averroës’ Noetics,”

⁴² “Quoniam, quia illud per quod agit aliquid suam propriam actionem est forma, nos autem agimus per intellectum {500} agentem nostram actionem propriam, necesse est ut intellectus agens sit forma in nobis. . . . Et cum ita sit, necesse est ut homo intelligat per intellectum sibi proprium omnia entia, et ut agat actionem sibi propriam in omnibus entibus, sicut intelligit per intellectum qui est in habitu, quando fuerit continuatus cum formis ymaginabilibus, omnia entia intellectione propria” (Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 399 {499-500}). On this text and its importance in the thought of Aquinas, see Taylor, “Intellect as Intrinsic Formal Cause in the Soul according to Aquinas and Averroës.”

⁴³ This principle and its use by Aquinas is something I have discussed elsewhere: Taylor, “The Agent Intellect as ‘form for us’ and Averroës’s Critique of al-Fārābī.”

⁴⁴ For example, see Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 356 {439}.

⁴⁵ See my “Intelligibles in act in Averroës,” in Brenet, ed., *Averroës et les averroïsmes juif et latin*. 111-40. There I identified the understanding of Themistius as Neoplatonic. H. J. Blumenthal argues against the influence of that tradition in his “Themistius, the Last Peripatetic Commentator on Aristotle?”, in *Arktouros, Hellenic Studies presented to Bernard*

of *De Anima of Aristotle*, Themistius held that the Productive / Agent Intellect is “actual intellect” and “has all the forms all together and presents all of them to itself at the same time” such that its essence is activity.⁴⁶ However, for Themistius the human actual intellect does not have of itself the intellectual power for abstraction but rather must be empowered by combining with, being taken over by, or being illuminated by the transcendent Productive or Agent Intellect in order to come to exist in the soul as united with the potential intellect.⁴⁷ Abstraction or separation of the intelligible in potency takes place when the Productive / Agent Intellect penetrates and takes over the human actual intellect such that intelligibles in potency can be converted to intelligibles in act.⁴⁸ In contrast, Averroës follows the Arabic

M. W. Knox on the occasion of his 65th birthday, ed. Glen W. Bowersock and others (Berlin, 1979), 391-400; see a revised version under the same title in *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, ed. Richard Sorabji (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 113-23. In this latter version, Blumenthal adds a brief discussion of the arguments of E. P. Mahoney in favor of identifying Neoplatonic language and notions in the thought of Themistius on the relationship of the human intellect and the transcendent Productive Intellect. See Mahoney’s “Themistius and the Agent Intellect in James of Viterbo and Other Thirteenth-Century Philosophers,” *Augustiniana* 23 (1973): 423-67. For other articles by Mahoney touching on this issue, see Blumenthal, “Themistius, the Last Peripatetic Commentator on Aristotle?” (1990), 119-21 and the notes there. I discuss the role of the *Paraphrase of the De Anima* by Themistius in the thought of Averroës at greater length in “Themistius and the Development of Averroës’ Noetics.”

⁴⁶ Themistius, *In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, ed. R. Heinze, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* 5.3 (Berlin: G. Reimeri, 1899), 100.20-21; Themistius, *On Aristotle’s On the Soul*, trans. Robert B. Todd (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 124. *An Arabic Translation of Themistius’ Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, ed. M. C. Lyons (Columbia, S.C., and Oxford: Bruno Cassirer Publishers Ltd., 1973), 181.12-13. This view may have also served the purpose of assuring that the abstractions made by individuals on the basis of sense perception and subsequent images formed in the soul are in accord with one another and the forms as in the Productive Intellect, though Themistius does not make explicit mention of this.

⁴⁷ See Themistius, *In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, Heinze, ed., 98.19-24 (Todd, trans., 122; Lyons, ed., 172-74); Heinze, ed., 99.6-10 (Todd, trans., 123; Lyons, ed., 179.6-9; and Heinze, ed., 103.30-33 (Todd, trans., 128-29; Lyons, ed., 188.12-14).

⁴⁸ Themistius writes that “. . . the productive intellect settles into the whole of the potential intellect, as though the carpenter and the smith did not control their wood and bronze externally but were able to pervade it totally. For this is how the actual intellect too is added to the potential intellect and becomes one with it” (*In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, Heinze, ed., 99.15-18 [Todd, trans., 123; Lyons, ed., 179.14-17]).

tradition in holding that there is a single transcendent Agent Intellect and did not give serious consideration to the notion that each human being has his or her own particular abstracting agent or actual intellect. Also unlike Themistius, Averroës does not consider the Agent Intellect to function as containing all forms.⁴⁹ Still, Averroës does find in Themistius this notion of the Agent Intellect functioning intrinsically in the human soul and describes this as the Agent Intellect acting as “form for us” in such a way that it is not only an efficient cause in abstraction but is actually in us as form, such that it is we who are abstracting and knowing, thanks to its presence and activity which is intrinsic to the soul.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ That the Productive / Agent Intellect contains all the forms I understand from the remarks of Themistius that (1) the potential intellect is moved to think only by an intellect that thinks all things (*In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, Heinze, ed., 103.31-32 [Todd, trans., 128; Lyons, ed., 188.12-13]); (2) “the intellect that illuminates in a primary sense is one” (*In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, Heinze, ed., 103.32 [Todd, trans., 128-29; Lyons, ed., 188.13-14]); (3) “we who are combined from the potential and the actual [intellects] are referred back to one productive intellect, and that what it is to be each of us is derived from that single [intellect]” (*In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, Heinze, ed., 103.36-38 [Todd, trans., 129; Lyons, ed., 188.18-189.1]); (4) “we would not understand one another unless there were a single intellect in which we all shared” (*In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, Heinze, ed., 104.2-3 [Todd, trans., 129; Lyons, ed., 189.3]); and (5) “divine intellect, which is separate and exists in actuality, thinks none of the enmattered forms” but thinks only separate forms “continuously and perpetually” (*In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, Heinze, ed., 114.34-115.9 [Todd, trans., 141; Lyons, ed., 209.16-210.10]). For a recent discussion of these issues in Themistius, see Myrna Gabbe, “Themistius on Concept Acquisition and Knowledge of Essences,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 92 (2010): 215-35.

⁵⁰ Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 356 {445}. Averroës seems to have read Themistius’s *Paraphrasis* 99.11ff. (Heinze, ed.; Todd, trans., 123.25ff.; Lyons, ed., 179.9ff.) as identifying the actual intellect with the Agent Intellect. For the *Middle Commentary* that seems clearly to be the case. See Averroës, *Middle Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima. A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation, Notes and Introduction*, ed. and trans. Alfred L. Ivry (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 117.8-10. There he writes, “You ought to know that Themistius and most commentators regard the intellect in us (*al-‘aql alladhī fī nā*) as composed of the intellect which is in potency (*al-‘aql bil-quwah*) and the intellect which is in act (*al-‘aql alladhī bil-fī‘l*), that is, the Agent Intellect (*al-‘aql al-fa‘‘āl*). In a certain way it is composite and does not think its essence but thinks what is here, when the imaginative intentions are joined to it. The intelligibles perish due to the passing away of these intentions, forgetting and error thus occurring to [our intellect]. They interpret Aristotle’s statement in this manner, as explained in our commentary on his discourse.”

The same is the case for the receptive Material Intellect as well. According to Averroës, intellectual understanding involves not just abstraction but also the reception of the intelligible transferred from the mode of being of an intelligible in potency to the mode of being of an intelligible in act. Insofar as the intelligible in act is no longer a determinate particular but rather an immaterial intelligible, it requires an immaterial subject to receive it. This subject is the Material Intellect which is shared by all human beings simply because there must be one set of intelligibles in act shared by all human beings for common knowledge, science and discourse, another notion taken from Themistius by Averroës.⁵¹

Hence, the philosophical framework within which Averroës conceptualizes the Agent Intellect as “form for us” is one that permits a transcendent and extrinsic power of an essential sort (the power of intellectual abstraction and understanding) to be shared in an intrinsic way. Averroës recognized and rejected for himself what he perceived to be Platonic elements such as recollection and a presence of forms outside the soul (in the Productive / Active Intellect) in the thought of Themistius.⁵² Yet Aristotle’s account of the separate, unaffected, unmixed, and essentially active Agent Intellect (*De anima* 3.5.430a17-18), required that the Agent

⁵¹ “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” (my translation). Cf. Lyons, ed., 188.17-189.4. This corresponds to Heinze, ed., 103.36-104.3; Todd, trans., 129: “There is no need to be puzzled if we who are combined from the potential and the actual [intellects] are referred back to one productive intellect, and that what it is to be each of us is derived from that single [intellect]. Where otherwise do the notions that are shared (*koimoi ennoiai*) come from? Where is the untaught and identical understanding of the primary definitions and primary axioms derived from? For we would not understand one another unless there were a single intellect that we all shared.”

⁵² “Et debes scire quod nulla differentia est secundum expositionem Themistii et antiquorum expositorum, et opinionem Platonis in hoc quod intellecta existentia in nobis sunt eterna, et quod addiscere est rememorari” (“You ought to know that there is no difference between the exposition of Themistius and the other ancient commentators and the opinion of Plato in regard to the fact that the intelligibles existing in us are eternal and that learning is recollection” [Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 361-62 {452}]).

Intellect be in some way intrinsic to the human soul as an essential part of the distinctive definition of human being as rational. The account which Averroës ultimately provides contains key components from Themistius, in particular (1) the essential combining, uniting, or sharing (scil., participating) of human intellect in the intellectual activity of abstraction of the transcendent, external, and ontologically distinct Agent Intellect, insofar as the Agent Intellect is “in the soul” and “form for us” such that we are active *by will* and essentially in the production of our own intellectual understanding; and (2) the notion that there must be a single collection of intelligibles in act shared by all human beings. For Averroës the requirements that we be the agents in our thinking and that the power by which we think be intrinsic yielded the conclusion that the Agent Intellect must be present as our proper form for these activities to take place. That is, the very nature and actuality of the transcendent Agent Intellect must be shared or participated by us essentially in the fullness of its intellectual power for abstraction and understanding, though Averroës does not use the language of participation to describe this. The same presence in the soul is required for the receptive Material Intellect as well.

II. AQUINAS AND THE REJECTED MODELS FROM THE ARABIC / ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

A) *al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājjā / Avempace*

At the beginning of his response in the article in question,⁵³ Aquinas immediately asserts that the Christian view that “the ultimate end of human life is the vision of God” should be understood to be precisely parallel with the assertion of the philosophers “that the ultimate happiness of human beings is to understand substances separate in being from matter.”⁵⁴ For there

⁵³ IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723]: “Responsio. Dicendum quod . . . peruenire quod Deum per essentiam uideat”

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* [22723]: “ultimam hominis felicitatem esse intelligere substantias separatas a materia secundum esse.”

are philosophers as well as theologians who hold that the “vision of God in his essence” is not possible. From among the philosophers, Aquinas cites the view of al-Fārābī recounted by Averroës in the *Long Commentary on De Anima*. However, the interpretation of al-Fārābī as conveyed by Averroës to Aquinas is only partially correct on the issue of the involvement of the Agent Intellect in human knowing, as I have noted. According to Averroës, for al-Fārābī knowledge of intelligibles comes about when the separately existing Agent Intellect acts as an extrinsic efficient cause providing assistance to the human soul to enable the transference of the intelligible in potency in the objects sensed from the level of particularity and intelligibility in potency to the level of intelligible in act in the individual rational soul or intellect. As Averroës—Aquinas’s sole source—views this, the account of al-Fārābī is inadequate because the Agent Intellect remains an extrinsic cause operating on the human soul. The notion of a genuine abstraction of intelligibles from sensory experience is something adopted by Averroës and, through Averroës, by Aquinas, though Averroës does not properly recognize that for al-Fārābī the action of abstraction is performed by the human being with a power provided by the Agent Intellect.⁵⁵

In this opening section of the response, however, Aquinas calls attention to Averroës’ report of the doctrine purportedly set forth by al-Fārābī in his lost *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*. Averroës writes, “For in his *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics* [al-Fārābī] seems to deny that there is conjoining with the separate intelligences. He says that this is the opinion of Alexander and that it should not be held that the human end is anything but theoretical perfection.”⁵⁶ That is, according to this report, which

⁵⁵ In this matter Aquinas is in fact in agreement with al-Fārābī in significant ways, insofar as Aquinas holds that the light or power of intellectual abstraction is given to human beings by a transcendent extrinsic power and that this power as an intrinsic part of the rational soul makes intellectual abstraction and understanding possible. For Aquinas this light of the intellect or power of intellectual understanding, the agent intellect, while naturally present in each human rational soul in the powers of active intellect and possible intellect, is nevertheless a likeness of and a participation in the divine intellectual light of God.

⁵⁶ Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 346 {433}.

came to Averroës through Ibn Bājja,⁵⁷ al-Fārābī denied that a genuine conjoining with the Agent Intellect in an immaterial noetic identity is possible, since such a thing would require that the human rational soul as a generated and corruptible entity change its substance and become eternal and ungenerated.⁵⁸ Hence, as Aquinas recounts from his reading of Averroës, al-Fārābī is reported to have denied that human beings are able to attain to the noetic conjunction and identity indicated in the intellectual understanding of separate substances. In the first section of his response Aquinas then remarks, “Likewise some theologians have asserted that the human intellect can never attain to the vision of God in his essence,” referring both to those who follow the Eastern Christian accounts and those who follow the analysis of knowing in Avicenna.⁵⁹

Immediately thereafter,⁶⁰ Aquinas characterizes this as a view shared by al-Fārābī and those theologians on account of “the distance between our intellect and the divine essence or other separate substances.” While citing Chrysostom for the theological position, Aquinas continues to analyze the issue in the epistemological and metaphysical terms of the philosophers. He writes regarding the issue motivating al-Fārābī’s denial of the understanding of separate substances that “it seems difficult for the created intellect to become [*fiat*] the uncreated essence in some way.” That is, it is problematic to think that there is a complete noetic identity of knower and known in an immaterial knowing when that would entail the transformation of a human being from a generated and corruptible entity into an immaterial and, consequently, imperishably eternal entity.

⁵⁷ See Harvey, “The Place of the Philosopher in the City according to Ibn Bājja.”

⁵⁸ Averroës several times discusses al-Fārābī’s change late in life to the view that the human immortality through intellectual conjoining is “an old wives’ tale.” See Averroës’ remarks in Epistle 1 in *Averroës. La béatitude de l’âme. Editions, traductions et études*, ed. and trans. Marc Geoffroy and Carlos Steel (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2001), 220; and Epistle 2 (*ibid.*, 230).

⁵⁹ See Torrell, “La vision de Dieu ‘per essentiam’ selon Saint Thomas d’Aquin,” 178-85.

⁶⁰ IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723]: “Et utrosque ad hoc mouet distantia . . . quarumcumque substantiarum separatarum.”

Aquinas's refutation of this view in following section⁶¹ cites *De videndo deum* by Maurus Magnentius Rabanus (d. 856) under the name of Augustine as an authority in support of the contrary view that there is vision of the divine essence. However, the rest of his analysis is purely philosophical. Insofar as intellectual understanding is the proper operation of human beings, the happiness of human beings must result from this operation. (This is simply based on the teleological account in the Function Argument from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.7). But if perfection of understanding in an Aristotelian noetic identity of knower and known does not reach the divine essence, then it is not God but something else in which human happiness consists. The latter is in fact the doctrine of al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroës, all of whom hold that ultimate human happiness is found in an intellectual understanding reaching the level of the Agent Intellect, or reaching the Agent Intellect itself, or involving the intrinsic presence of the Agent Intellect and the Material Intellect in the human soul. For Aquinas, however, that view is absurd "since the ultimate perfection of anything is in the conjoining with its principle,"⁶² that is, a return and a reverting to its principle. In this case, ultimate perfection can only be found in a complete reversion to the first acting principle (*principium effectivum*), God. This Neoplatonic philosophical principle of procession and return, which Aquinas found in Dionysius and elsewhere,⁶³ he appeals to theologically by citing the Book of Revelation, chapter 22, verse 13: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," in the *divisio textus* in his commentary on the second distinction of book 1 of the *Sentences*. There he writes, "Consideration of this doctrine will be concerning things insofar as they proceed [*exeunt*] from God as from a principle, and insofar as they are brought back into him as

⁶¹ Ibid. [22723]: "Set hec positio omnino stare non potest . . . in fine eas possimus intelligere."

⁶² Ibid. [22723]: "cum ultima perfectio cuiuslibet sit in coniunctione ad suum principium."

⁶³ The literature on this subject is vast. For an example, see Paul Rorem, "'Procession and Return' in Thomas Aquinas and his Predecessors," *The Princeton Seminary Review* 13 (1992): 147-63.

to the end.”⁶⁴ By contrast, the appeal to this idea in the context of the article we are considering from book 4 of the *Sentences* commentary is philosophical, not theological. Both al-Fārābī and the Christian theologians are wrong in thinking that the human soul cannot attain to the vision of God and the reason is this principle of procession and return.

Next,⁶⁵ expressing his own view that the vision of the divine essence can occur for our intellect, just as some of the philosophers say the human intellect can have vision of separate substances, Aquinas now cites the doctrine of al-Fārābī (here his positive view, not the skeptical view ascribed to his lost *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*) and Ibn Bājjā / Avempace on the nature and end of abstraction. In what follows Aquinas forms his account from the critical analysis by Averroës of the role of imagination in the thought of al-Fārābī and Ibn Bājjā. Each of these philosophers had asserted that subsequent to sense perception the imagination provides forms for intellectual abstraction and separation from material conditions such that “what results is the understood quiddity which is one and the same for diverse understanding <human beings>.”⁶⁶ Drawing on Averroës’ analysis of abstraction in Ibn Bājjā, Aquinas writes that “when our intellect reaches the highest abstraction of any intelligible quiddity, it understands by this the quiddity of the separate substance which is like it.”⁶⁷

Aquinas’s discussion of the role and nature of abstraction in the thought of Ibn Bājjā, again based solely on the *Long Commentary* by Averroës, continues in the next section⁶⁸ where he explains Ibn Bājjā’s abstractive theory of ascension, as it were proceeding up through abstractive quidditative formalities until it reaches a

⁶⁴ “consideratio huius doctrinae de rebus secundum quod exeunt a Deo ut a principio, et secundum quod referuntur in ipsum ut in finem” (Mandonnet, ed., 57).

⁶⁵ IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723].

⁶⁶ Ibid. [22723]: “remanet quidditas intellecta que est una et eadem apud diuersos intelligentes.”

⁶⁷ Ibid. [22723]: “quando intellectus noster peruenit ad summam abstractionem quidditatis intelligibilis cuiuscumque, intelligit per hoc quidditatem substantie separate que est ei similis.” Cf. Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 391ff. {490 ff.}; *ibid.*, 338-39 {424}.

⁶⁸ IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723].

quiddity that is ultimate and from which no further quiddity can be abstracted. For Ibn Bājja himself the intellectual exercise of forming and knowing abstractions of various sorts in language, natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics leads to a unity with the Agent Intellect. The purpose of or end served by intellectual understanding is conjunction and unity with the Agent Intellect—from which perhaps can come a higher unity with God, the True One. Aquinas rejects this approach,⁶⁹ founded on merely the exercise of human intellectual powers of abstraction, simply because the *ratio* or formal content of an abstracted material substance, let us say of a horse or any number of any other material quiddities, is not of the same *ratio* or formal content as a separately existing intellectual substance, an entity of a completely different sort. The exercise of intellectual abstraction based on material substances cannot lead to the knowledge of an entity that is essentially immaterial—that is, it cannot lead to the quiddity of a separate substance and cannot lead to “above all the divine essence which is of a *ratio* altogether different from every created quiddity.”⁷⁰ (In this Ibn Bājja himself is in agreement, though Aquinas apparently cannot see this, through the account he has from Averroës.)

Aquinas rejects the same approach in the next part⁷¹ again on philosophical grounds since, according to the Porphyrian Tree, the only likeness of *ratio* or formality between a material substance and an immaterial substance would be the remote genus of substance which is said of both. But this is knowledge only in a remote and qualified way without apprehension of distinctive defining difference. He writes, “Consequently, to know God or other separate substances in this way is not to see the divine essence or the quiddity of a separate substance but it is to know through the effect and as it were in a mirror.”⁷² Abstraction alone,

⁶⁹ Ibid. [22723].

⁷⁰ Ibid. [22723]: “precipue diuinam essentiam que maxime est alterius rationis ab omni quidditate creata.”

⁷¹ Ibid. [22723].

⁷² Ibid. [22723]: “Vnde sic cognoscere Deum uel alias substantias separatas non est uidere essentiam diuinam uel quidditatem substantie separate, set est cognoscere per effectum et quasi in speculo.”

then, cannot garner of itself anything beyond the nature of what constitute the primary objects for abstraction. Rather, such abstraction remains an understanding of an effect, not of the very essence of the cause of that effect which is sought in this context. In this Aquinas is in fact in agreement with Ibn Bājja though they deal with the consequences quite differently. For Ibn Bājja this means that Aristotelian abstraction should be rejected and that a form of Platonism involving the attainment of unity with the Agent Intellect is the only way for the human soul to achieve the fullness of knowledge of intelligible forms.⁷³

B) *Avicenna*

The second rejected model is that of Avicenna who speaks of intelligibles in act being emanated from the separate intellects—the Agent Intellect, to be precise—and impressed upon the human rational soul. Aquinas, however, concerns himself not with this problem but rather only with the account of the Agent Intellect as emanating from individual human rational souls when he writes in the following section⁷⁴ that, according to Avicenna, “the separate substances are understood by us through the intentions of their quiddities which are certain likenesses of them not abstracted from them—because they are themselves immaterial—but impressed by these on our souls.”⁷⁵ The point here is that the

⁷³ See the account of Genequand in his introduction to Ibn Bajja (Avempace), *La conduite de l'isolé et deux autres épîtres*, 53-82.

⁷⁴ *IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723].

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* [22723]: “substantie separate intelliguntur a nobis per intentiones suarum quidditatum que sunt quedam ipsarum similitudines non abstracte ab eis, quia ipsemet sunt immateriales, set impresse ab eis in animabus nostris.” Here Aquinas has in mind *Avicenna Latinus. Liber de Philosophia Prima sive Scientia Divine*, I-V, ed. S. Van Riet, ed. (Louvain: Peeters; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), tract. 3, c. 8 (p. 162), where Avicenna writes regarding knowledge of separate substances, “Sed quia quod invenitur in nobis de illis est impressiones quae assimilantur eis sine dubio, et hoc est nostra scientia de illis” (“But this is because what is found in us regarding these are impressions which are undoubtedly like these, and this constitutes our knowledge of them”). This corresponds to Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ. Al-Ilāhiyyāt*, vol. 1, ed. G. C. Anawati and Saʿid Zayed (Cairo: Organisation générale des imprimeries gouvernementales, 1960), 144 (“Rather, from these what exist for us undoubtedly are influences imitative of them and this is our knowledge [of them]”). I am glad to express my thanks to Amos Bertolacci for help in locating this precise reference.

separate substances are understood through mediating likenesses and not directly, according to Avicenna. Hence, the same will hold regarding the knowledge of God who can be apprehended only through a likeness and not directly.

Aquinas rejects⁷⁶ this Avicennian approach because of the principle that “everything which is received in something is in this in the mode of the recipient,” which yields the problematic consequence that “the likeness of the divine essence impressed by it on our intellect will be through the mode of our intellect.” That is, what will be in the human intellect will be imperfect and diminished in accord with the mode and nature of our imperfect human intellects, not in accord with the divine essence as it is in itself. In this way even if the *ratio* or formal notion of the divine essence is present to the human intellect, it will be present there not as it is in itself but rather in accord with the recipient’s own incomplete and weaker mode of perfection, as if the human intellect were to have in it a small bit of whiteness in regard to what has in itself a great deal of whiteness. Aquinas adds⁷⁷ that this Avicennian way is said to be inadequate if it attains only the ratio of the genus, as discussed earlier, and it is inadequate if “it concerns the same ratio of the genus but only according to analogy.” Here Aquinas’s concern is more clearly expressed when he writes,

Similarly, to the extent that the intellect understands some quiddity, it is necessary that the likeness of its *ratio* in species come to be in us, although perhaps the mode of being for each is not the same. For the form existing in intellect or in sense is not the principle of knowing according to the mode of being it has in each, but according to the *ratio* in which it shares with the exterior thing. In this way it is evident that there is no likeness received in the created intellect by which God can in this way be understood such that his essence is seen immediately. Hence, also, some asserting that the divine essence is seen only through this mode said that the essence itself is not seen but some brightness, as if a ray of it.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723].

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* [22723].

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* [22723]: “Et similiter ad hoc quod intellectus intelligat aliquam quidditatem, oportet quod fiat in eo similitudo eiusdem rationis secundum speciem, quamvis forte non sit idem modus essendi utrobique.

That is, to see God “face-to-face” or to understand the divine essence is to apprehend it immediately in a way that requires that there be no mediating likeness as found in the epistemology of Avicenna, an epistemology that might be termed a sort of representationalism. Any mediating likeness as something created will be a representation and not the divine essence itself.

C) The Model Adopted from the Arabic / Islamic Philosophical Tradition: Alexander and Averroës

Aquinas goes on⁷⁹ to set forth his own doctrine, explicitly stating that he is drawing on the views of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroës as found in book 3 of the *Long Commentary on De Anima* by Averroës. He begins by reviewing the philosophical principles that must be respected in the account. First, the form apprehended in cognition of immaterial separate substances cannot be derived by abstraction based on apprehension of composite material substances. What is known in such abstraction cannot be more than what is present in the apprehended composite material substances, a position Aquinas shares with Ibn Bājjā, as mentioned earlier. For, in that case what is known would not be the separate substance but rather the composite determinate material substances and their nature, the starting points and foundations of the abstraction. Second, if a separate substance is to be known in its essence, it cannot be known through the mediation of a representative impression caused by a separate substance, for that would not be direct knowledge of the essence but rather knowledge of something created. Hence, as Aquinas puts it, “Rather, it is the separate

“Non enim forma existens in intellectu uel sensu est principium cognitionis secundum modum essendi quem habet utrobique, set secundum rationem in qua communicat cum re exteriori. Et ita patet quod per nullam similitudinem receptam in intellectu creato potest Deus intelligi ita quod essentia eius uideatur immediate. Vnde etiam quidam ponentes diuinam essentiam solum per hunc modum uideri, dixerunt quod ipsa essentia non uidebitur, set quidam fulgor quasi radius ipsius.”

⁷⁹ IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723].

substance itself which is conjoined to our intellect as form, so that it is what is understood and that by which it is understood.”⁸⁰

In the context of this discussion of knowing separate substances, Aquinas reads Averroës’ doctrine as requiring that separate intellects be both that by which we know (*qua intelligitur*) the separate intellect, that is, that it be “form for us” as intrinsic to the soul, and that it also be that which is known (*quod intelligitur*), that is, the apprehended object of knowing. In the teachings of Averroës this would correspond to the notion that the powers by which knowing takes place (*qua intelligitur*) are the separate Agent Intellect and the separate Material Intellect working together and that which is known (*quod intelligitur*) are the intelligibles in act in the separate Material Intellect. Phrased in another way, the formal and intrinsic power by which the activity of intellectual understanding takes place are these cooperating separate intellects and the objects of that intellectual understanding consist of intelligibles in act in the Material Intellect. This is Averroës’ account of natural human knowing, an account very different from that of Aquinas, who holds that these intellects are in fact just powers of the individual soul and that the objects of understanding are the natures of things in the world.⁸¹ In taking over this model, Aquinas understands God’s very own divine essence as that by which we understand (corresponding to the Agent Intellect or, better, the Agent Intellect and Material Intellect working together) through a conjoining and also as that very thing which is understood (corresponding to the abstracted intelligibles that come to exist in the Material Intellect).⁸² That is to say, in

⁸⁰ Ibid. [22723]: “set est ipsa substantia separata que coniungitur intellectui nostro ut forma, ut ipsa sit quod hic intelligitur et qua intelligitur.”

⁸¹ For Averroës the Material Intellect and the Agent Intellect are principles philosophically discovered by the analysis of human cognition rather than direct objects of human intellectual experience. What is experienced by human beings is the apprehension of intelligibles in act that constitutes science in the human theoretical intellect. For the human individual, knowledge of these two intellects comes not by some direct perception as such but rather through a complex reasoned account.

⁸² IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723]: “[E]st ipsa substantia separata que coniungitur intellectui nostro ut forma, ut ipsa sit quod hic intelligitur et qua intelligitur.”

Objection 15 of this article [22715] contends that “in heaven God is seen through a medium which is the light of glory [*lumen glorie*], as is clear in Psalm 35, 10: we will see the

natural knowing for Averroës the Agent Intellect comes to be “form for us,” empowering the human being to come to have intellectual understanding thanks to aid from outside; in corresponding fashion, for Aquinas in supernatural knowing it is God who comes from outside to be formally present in the soul, enhancing its power of understanding as “form for us” in our finite knowing of the divine essence. As Averroës did not hold that the very substance of the Agent Intellect came ontologically into the human soul to become the very substance of the human soul, so too for Aquinas the divine essence itself does not come to exist ontologically in the human soul, replacing the human substance

light in your light. Therefore he will not be seen in his essence.” Aquinas responds [22738] by distinguishing three media in bodily and intellectual vision, concluding that God is immediately present to the human intellect as that which gives the elevated power of cognizing to the human intellect and as the unmediated object cognized. “To the fifteenth objection it should be said that the medium in bodily vision and intellectual [vision] is found to be threefold. The first is the medium under which it is seen; this is what perfects vision for seeing in general, not determining vision to some special object, as bodily light is related to bodily vision and the light of the agent intellect to the possible intellect. The second is the medium by which it is seen; this is the visible form by which each power of vision is determined to a special object, as by the form of the stone for cognizing the stone. The third is the medium in which it is seen. This is that through the inspection of which sight is brought to another thing, as by inspecting a mirror one is led to these things which are represented in the mirror and by seeing the image one is led to the object imaged [in the mirror]. In this way too through the cognition of the effect the intellect is led to the cause, or the converse. In the vision characteristic of heaven there will not be a third medium, as if God were cognized through the species of other things, as He is now cognized by means of the ratio regarding which we are said now to see in a mirror. Nor will there be there a second medium because the very divine essence will be that by which our intellect will see God, as is evident from what has been said. But there will be there only the first medium which will elevate our intellect to this which can be conjoined with the uncreated essence in the way mentioned. But by this medium a mediated cognition is not meant because it does not fall between the cognizer and the thing cognized, but rather it is that which gives to the one cognizing the power of cognizing.” Though aspects of the idea have important scriptural and theological antecedents, the term *lumen gloriae* can be traced to Albert the Great who seems to have developed it out of his study of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius and his knowledge of teachings in philosophical psychology in Avicenna and the Latin Christian theologians who sought to use the Persian philosopher’s insights in their consideration of the soul and God. See Nikolaus Wicki, *Die Lehre von der himmlischen Seligkeit in der mittelalterlichen Scholastik von Petrus Lombardus bis Thomas von Aquin* (Frankfurt an Main: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1954), esp. 154ff. Regarding the use and development of Avicennian thought by Latin Christian theologians, see Magdalena Bieniak, *The Soul-Body Problem at Paris, ca. 1200-1250* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010).

with the divine. Regarding what is understood, for Averroës the object of intellectual understanding is to be found in the abstracted intelligible as intelligible in act in the Material Intellect, though it is garnered from sensory experience of a nature instantiated in a particular thing in the world; for Aquinas the object of intellectual understanding is not the abstracted form which is the intelligible species, a likeness of the thing, but rather the nature of the thing in the world.⁸³ In the context of knowing God *per essentiam* or face-to-face, God himself substitutes for the intelligible species as likeness and also the thing on which the likeness is based in natural knowing since in supernatural knowing there is no representative likeness but rather just God himself.⁸⁴

Aquinas goes on⁸⁵ to insist that in the vision of God in his essence that by which the vision takes place (*qua intelligitur*) must be the divine essence itself acting as an enhancing form. He stresses that this is not to be understood as in natural philosophy: “It ought not to be understood as if the divine essence is the true form of our intellect or that out of this and our intellect simply one thing is made, as in natural things made from natural form and matter.”⁸⁶ That is, the divine essence should not be understood as becoming ontologically the very form constituting human intellect and carrying out the operation of intellectual understanding. Were that the case, it would be God knowing God,

⁸³ See II *Sent.*, d. 2, q. 3, a. 1 [3792]: “in intellectu vero humano similitudo rei intellectae est aliud a substantia intellectus, et est sicut forma ejus; unde ex intellectu et similitudine rei efficitur unum completum, quod est intellectus in actu intelligens; et hujus similitudo est accepta a re.”

⁸⁴ Here Aquinas is content to set forth the basic doctrine and to indicate the helpfulness of the model from Averroës and Alexander as explicated by Averroës. Later, in article 6 of this question, Aquinas shows that the enhancing of the power of the soul in fact requires first the bringing about of a disposition in the soul for the reception of the vision of God. As Katja Krause has indicated in her 30 May 2012 presentation at the conference *The Sentences of Lombard and the Commentary of Aquinas* held at the Institut Catholique de Paris, in article 6 Aquinas begins to turn to the noetics of Alexander to provide a fuller account of the new disposition given to the soul in the light of glory by God so that he may be seen *per essentiam*, albeit not comprehensively.

⁸⁵ IV *Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723].

⁸⁶ Ibid. [22723]: “Quod quidem non debet intelligi, quasi diuina essentia sit uera forma intellectus nostri uel quod ex ea et intellectu nostro efficiatur unum simpliciter, sicut in naturalibus ex forma et materia naturali.”

not a blessed human being in heaven knowing God face-to-face. Instead, he writes,

Rather, [it should be understood to come about] because the relation of the divine essence to our intellect is as the relation of form to matter. For whenever there are any two things of which one is more perfect than the other and these are received in the same recipient, there is a relation of one of the two to the other, namely, of the more perfect to the less perfect, as is the relation of form to matter.⁸⁷

It is not inappropriate to use the language of matter and form to characterize the perfection of one thing by another. Aquinas takes this principle from several passages in Averroës' *Long Commentary*, among them the following two.

For with respect to every activity which has come to be from the gathering together of two different things, it is necessarily the case that one of those two be as it were matter and instrument and the other be as it were form or agent. The intellect in us, therefore, is composed of the intellect which is in a positive disposition and the agent intellect, either in such a way that the propositions are as it were matter and the agent intellect is as it were form, or in such a way that the propositions are as it were the instrument and the agent intellect is as it were the efficient [cause]. For the disposition is similar in this case.⁸⁸

When this conjoining in us between the agent intellect and the material intellect has been established, we will be able to find out the way in which we say that the agent intellect is similar to form and that the intellect which is in a positive disposition (*in habitu*) is similar to matter. For in regard to any two things of which one is the subject and the second is more actual than the other, it is necessary that the relation of the more actual to the less actual be as the relation of form to matter. With this intention we say that the proportion of the first

⁸⁷ Ibid. [22723]: "Set quia proportio essentie diuine ad intellectum nostrum est sicut proportio forme ad materiam. Quandocumque enim aliqua duo quorum unum est altero perfectius, recipiuntur in eodem receptibili, proportio unius ad alterum, scilicet magis perfecti ad minus perfectum, est sicut proportio forme ad materiem."

⁸⁸ Taylor, trans., *Long Commentary on the De Anima*, 397 {497}: "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 sunt quasi instrumentum et intellectus agens est quasi efficiens; dispositio enim in hoc est consimilis."

actuality of the imaginative power to the first actuality of the common sense is as the proportion of form to matter.⁸⁹

For Aquinas the divine essence must not completely displace the power of the human intellect in an ontological way; instead, the human intellect, itself a formal power of the soul, receptive in relation to the enhancing intellectual power of the divine essence, finds the divine essence to be present in it (*inhabitans*, “indwelling,” albeit not literally as if ontologically identical) as a supernatural actualizing power by which the divine essence can be seen as object. Aquinas states that the model for this is found in Averroës and Alexander insofar as they speak of the Agent Intellect as being “in the soul” (again, as does Aristotle in *De Anima* 3.5.430a13: *en tē psuchē*) as a form acting in intellection and as a separate substance apprehended by that intellection.⁹⁰ This is the notion of acquired intellect in Alexander, the notion that in intellectual understanding the perishable human soul comes to have acting in it, with the power of intellectuality, the Agent Intellect itself, which for Alexander is God. In the case of Averroës as understood here by Aquinas, it means that it is not necessary that the formality by which intellectual understanding takes place (*qua intelligitur*) be solely intrinsic; rather, it is reasonable to hold that a separately existing immaterial substance can be the power by which intellectual understanding takes place.

In the final section of Aquinas’s response,⁹¹ he spells out this philosophical account of how the divine essence is form for the

⁸⁹ Ibid., 398 {499}: “Et cum fuerit verificata nobis hec continuatio que est inter intellectum agentem et intellectum materialem, poterimus reperire modum secundum quem dicimus quod intellectus agens similis est forme et quod intellectus qui est in habitu similis est materie. Omnia enim duo quorum subiectum est unum, et quorum alterum est perfectius alio, necesse est ut respectus perfectioris ad imperfectius sit sicut respectus forme ad materiam. Et secundum hanc intentionem dicimus quod proportio prime perfectionis virtutis ymaginative ad primam perfectionem communis sensus et sicut proportio forme ad materiam.”

⁹⁰ Note that what is accepted from Alexander and Averroës for the description of the supernatural enhancement of the human intellect *in patria* is the notion of “form for us” which for them described an enhancement required for natural human knowing. Aquinas by no means accepts their shared view that the individual human soul perishes with the death of the body.

⁹¹ *IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 1 [22723].

human intellect by explicating the relevant principles supporting this teaching. First, he explains that the notion that the formal power of intellectual understanding (“a form by which the intellect understands,” *qua intelligitur*) and the intellect itself come to be one in intellectual understanding (*quod intelligitur*) should be understood as analogous to hylomorphism, the unity of form and matter which constitutes a single existing being. In this way there is a single understanding of the divine essence on the part of the human being which comes about when the divine essence is *qua intelligitur* or, in the language of Averroës, “form for us,” in this enhanced human intellectual understanding of *quod intelligitur*, the object of understanding, the separate substance, the divine essence itself.

However, it is important to understand how the analogy falters or is imperfect. In the case of natural things, what is subsistent—the hylomorphic composite—cannot function as the form for some other matter. Matter cannot be the form of anything, and so what is itself a composite of form and matter cannot also be the form for some other matter. But, argues Aquinas, for an immaterial substance subsisting per se such as the human soul, there is nothing in its principles precluding its becoming form of some matter and composite with that matter. Aquinas then states, “However, in the case of the intellect, it is necessary that the intellect in potency itself be taken as matter and the intelligible species as form; the intellect understanding in act will be as composed of each.”⁹² That is, the intellect itself which is an actuality and an immaterial form can be considered insofar as it has potentiality for the reception of intelligible forms which will perfect it in its full actuality. This is what Aquinas calls the possible intellect. This receptive intellect is able to receive another form, the intelligible species, in intellectual understanding, thereby becoming “understanding in act” as “something composed of each.” The reception of this form further actualizes and perfects the human intellect, which becomes an intellect understanding in

⁹² Ibid. [22723]: “In intellectu autem oportet accipere ipsum intellectum in potentia quasi materiam et speciem intelligibilem quasi formam, et intellectus in actu intelligens erit quasi compositum ex utroque.”

act through that reception and perfection. Hence, in principle it is not unthinkable that what is already an intellect be further actualized by another form. In this way it is not unthinkable that a transcendent immaterial form come to be formal and actual in relation to another lower form in a way analogous to the perfecting and enhancing relationship of form to matter. That is, Aquinas is stating that there are two senses in which separate substance can be “form for us.” The first is as a supervening form and a formal principle of understanding, in a fashion similar to that in which Averroës has the separate Agent Intellect provide the needed actuality for intellectual understanding by the individual. The second sense is that by which the object apprehended comes to be a known form in the human being. In Averroës this was the teaching that the abstracted forms come to exist in the separate Material Intellect functioning as their ontological subject, a subject to which human beings are connected in intellectual understanding through intelligibles abstracted but originally provided as intelligibles in potency in the human imaginative power taken broadly. For Aquinas, however, the object abstracted in natural human cognition becomes the intelligible species in an individual human mind which is not the object of knowledge itself but a means to knowing the objects of knowledge, the natures of the things of the world.

Hence, we see that there are models showing how what is form and intellect can receive another form and perfection. But how can this be understood in the case of some immaterial subsisting substance which is not in matter but is at once intelligible and intelligent? Aquinas states a principle from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, when he writes, “However, any given thing is intelligible insofar as it is in act, not insofar as it is in potency, as is evident in Book 9 of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.”⁹³ This Aquinas cites to set up his

⁹³ The proper reference is to *Metaphysics* 8.6 [1045b24]. However, Aquinas is following the text and interpretation found in the Latin translation of Averroës’s *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*. The Arabic translation differs considerably from the Greek. Averroës interprets it to mean that the immaterial separate entities moving the heavens, insofar as they are pure forms and actualities separate from matter, are thereby per se intelligible as well as intelligent. See *Averroës Tafsiṛ mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, S.J., vol. 2 (Beirut:

assertion that this doctrine can apply to the divine essence acting in the human intellect. For “the divine essence is pure act.” Given this, the divine essence must be pure intellect and hence capable of being in the human intellect as its form, as Averroës and Alexander—as understood by Aquinas—assert is the case when the human intellect is in the activity of intellectual understanding. However, what is an immaterial form per se is a form which is immediately intelligible per se. In this case there is no need for abstraction and separation of the intelligible form from matter. Hence, since the divine essence is itself pure act, Aquinas concludes that “it can be a form by which the intellect understands, and this will be the beatific vision.”⁹⁴ As J.-B. Brenet has pointed out, in this case God is able to be present to the soul in the same way that the intelligible species is present to the soul as that by means of which science of worldly things is possessed. However, in this case what is present in that fashion does not require abstraction in order to be intelligible, since God is a pure form.⁹⁵ Here Aquinas has passed beyond the accounts of Alexander and Averroës to present his own teaching, for Alexander did not propose that God is the direct apprehended object of intellectual understanding, nor did Averroës assert that there is direct intellectual cognition of the Agent or Material Intellects. Hence, we find Aquinas here using their teachings on separate intellect as “form for us” in a way very different from the way they use it.

Dar al-Machreq Editeurs [Imprimerie Catholique], 1967²), book *ā*, c. 16, p. 1102; *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libri XIII cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis et epitome in In Aristotelis Opera Cum Averrois Commentariis* (Venice: Iunctas, 1574), vol. 8, VIII, c. 16, f. 225r F. On form as the cause of actuality, see *Metaphysics* 8.2 [1043a19-21]. The cause of actuality in a composite thing is the form. See *Averroes Tafsiṛ mā ba’d al-ṭabī’ah*, book *ā*, c. 7, p. 1055; *Aristotelis Metaphysicorum Libri XIII*, VIII, c. 7, f. 215v K. I discuss this in “Averroes on Psychology and the Principles of Metaphysics,” *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36 (1998): 507-23; see 519-21, especially 519 n. 41.

⁹⁴ [22723] *poterit esse forma qua intellectus intelligit. Et hec erit visio beatificans.*

⁹⁵ See Brenet, “Vision béatifique et séparation de l’intellect.”

IV. CONCLUSION

What we have seen here is the use of the thought of Averroës and Alexander by Aquinas as he sets forth a philosophical justification for the Christian theological doctrine of beatitude. That justification was found in Aquinas's understanding of the philosophical noetics of ordinary human intellectual understanding as set forth in the *Long Commentary on De Anima* by Averroës. Other accounts, such as those of al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājja, and Avicenna were rejected as unsuitable models since they involved either a denial of an intellectual understanding of separate intellectual substance or a denial that such an intellectual understanding can take place directly and without intermediate representation.

Aquinas also expounds this doctrine and names Averroës explicitly in disputed question 8 *De Veritate* (*De cognitione angelorum*), article 1, entitled, "Whether the angels see God in his essence." There he reasons that beatitude consisting of the intellectual vision of God is the most perfect operation of a rational creature. Using the notion that the ultimate perfection of anything involves its return to its principle, he explains that, since faith teaches that God creates all rational creatures immediately, "it is necessary according to faith that every rational creature who reaches beatitude sees God in his essence."⁹⁶ He later mentions Averroës (and not Alexander) as the source for the key notion, writing

How a separate essence can be joined to the intellect as form the Commentator shows as follows in Book 3 [of his commentary] on *De Anima*: whenever two things one of which is more perfect⁹⁷ than the other are received into something able to receive [them], the proportion of the more perfect to the less perfect is as the proportion of form to what it is able to perfect, as light is the perfection of color when both are received in a transparent [medium]. For this reason since the created intellect which is present in a created substance is more imperfect than

⁹⁶ "Unde oportet secundum fidem ut omnis creatura rationalis quae ad beatitudinem penrenit, per essentiam Deum videat" (*Sancti Thomae de Aquino, Opera omnia*, 22/2, editio Leonina [Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1972] 217.153-55).

⁹⁷ And as such, more actual.

the divine essence existing in it, the divine essence is compared in a certain way as form in relation to that which is understood.⁹⁸

The doctrine of Aquinas remains the same in later works, so the importance of Averroës for the formation of Aquinas's account of beatitude persists even if unstated.⁹⁹ However, as Brenet points out, reference to Averroës regarding this teaching disappears with the *Summa contra Gentiles*.¹⁰⁰

Yet it would seem that precisely the sort of epistemological solution that Aquinas permits here for understanding the intellectual understanding or seeing of God in his essence or “face-to-face” is the very epistemological solution he altogether rejects in other works when analyzing the epistemology of Averroës. Elsewhere Aquinas insists that the agent intellect and material intellect cannot be separate in being because these powers of knowing must be intrinsically present in the human knower, for otherwise the knower would not be the human being but the separate intellects.¹⁰¹ It is this problem to which several

⁹⁸ *De Verit.*, q. 8, a. 1: “Qualiter autem essentia separata possit coniungi intellectui ut forma, sic ostendit Commentator in III De anima: quodcumque in aliquo receptibili recipiuntur duo quorum unum est altero perfectius, proportio perfectioris ad minus perfectum est sicut proportio formae ad suum perfectibile, sicut lux est perfectio coloris cum ambo recipiuntur in diaphano; et ideo cum intellectus creatus, qui inest substantiae creatae, sit imperfectior divina essentia in eo existente, comparabitur divina essentia ad illum intellectum quodam modo ut forma” (Leon. ed., 218.208-34).

⁹⁹ See, for example, *STh* I, q. 12; I-II, qq. 1-5.

¹⁰⁰ Brenet, “S’unir à l’intellect, voir Dieu,” 240. Brenet explains that in an early version of the *Summa contra Gentiles* Aquinas mentions Averroës in connection with the issue of beatitude but Aquinas chose to remove that reference in the final version.

¹⁰¹ For example, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2.59, 12: “Id quo aliquid operatur, oportet esse formam eius: nihil enim agit nisi secundum quod est actu; actu autem non est aliquid nisi per id quod est forma eius; unde et Aristoteles probat animam esse formam, per hoc quod animal per animam vivit et sentit. Homo autem intelligit, et non nisi per intellectum: unde et Aristoteles, inquirens de principio quo intelligimus, tradit nobis naturam intellectus possibilis. Oportet igitur intellectum possibilem formaliter uniri nobis, et non solum per suum obiectum.” *Summa contra gentiles* (Rome: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918) [*S. Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia Iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita Cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum Tomus XIII*], p. 415b. Texts such as this found in a number of the works of Aquinas are analyzed in my article, “Intellect as Intrinsic Formal Cause in the Soul according to Aquinas and Averroës,” in *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul. Reflections on Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions*, ed. Maha El-Kaisy Friemuth and John M. Dillon (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 187-220.

fourteenth-century supporters of Aquinas called attention when they raised the issue of whether his teaching is in contradiction to his own critique of Averroës.¹⁰² For the present, I would suggest that here the context and the purpose are different. In the *Commentary on the Sentences* Aquinas is speaking of the supernatural involvement of God in enabling a vision of the divine essence by the blessed *in patria*, in the afterlife. The context is not that of natural human knowing *in via*, in the course of life in the natural world. Hence, what we find here is not so much a contradiction to the critical rejection of Averroës' view of natural knowing *in via* that Aquinas vehemently set forth repeatedly, as rather an instance where the "form for us" account Aquinas saw in the natural accounts of Averroës and Alexander is found by him to be suitable as a model for understanding the non-natural, indeed supernatural, vision of the divine essence promised for the afterlife in Scripture as ultimate human beatitude. In the account in the *Commentary on the Sentences* Aquinas is not philosophically proving that the nature of the final end of human beings is the beatific vision. That would require a much more thoroughly argued teleological account. Rather, here Aquinas begins with the Christian theological doctrine assumed as true by faith and draws deeply on the Arabic and Greek philosophical traditions to provide a consistent account of just how that theological teaching may be understood cogently. As I see it, this constitutes just another instance of the work of thinkers of the Abrahamic tradition as they negotiate their way toward a more thoughtful conciliation of revealed religion and natural human reason. The same is found in very differing ways in al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājjā, Avicenna, and Averroës, even if their negotiations were more rationalist in character than would likely suit Aquinas and others of the Latin tradition. Still, all of these thinkers held for the existence of one First Cause and Ultimate Principle of the universe as God and each in his own way asserted that understanding of that First Cause constitutes part or all of the end for human beings and ultimate human happiness.

¹⁰² See Brenet, "Vision béatifique et séparation de l'intellect,"; Ermatinger, "Giles of Rome and Anthony of Parma in an Anonymous Question on the Intellect."

Aquinas is the most well known, innovative, and insightful theologian and philosopher in Europe in the High Middle Ages and in various ways his teachings and methods continue to nourish theological and philosophical thought even today. However, it is less broadly known and less well documented with precision that the thought of Aquinas was very profoundly influenced by his engagement with philosophical teachings arising originally in the Arabic / Islamic philosophical tradition in such diverse places as Baghdad, Cordoba, Cairo, and Bukhara. In each of these cities and many others throughout the lands under the governance of Muslim political leaders, the intellectual development of philosophy and science continued with new analyses and understandings of optics, medicine, mathematics, natural sciences, and philosophical reasoning, not uncommonly with Muslims, Christians, and Jews working together as teachers and students. Philosophy and science as advanced in the Arabic / Islamic tradition was foundational to the development of thought in Europe through extensive translations at Toledo in Spain, at the court of Frederick II in Sicily, and elsewhere.

Considered in this context, Aquinas has much in common with the philosophical tradition found in the Islamic world insofar as he worked to reconcile the powerful philosophical reasoning of the Greek pagan tradition with the monotheism common to the religions of the three Abrahamic traditions, as had philosophical thinkers of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions alive inside the Islamic world. Viewed in this light, Aquinas as well as other thinkers such as his teacher, Albert the Great, the Franciscan Bonaventura, and many other Europeans can be seen as forming their philosophical and theological views only through participation in what is a common negotiation between secular philosophy and science on the one hand and, on the other hand, the common values and principles found in the Abrahamic traditions. The unproductive negative model of conflict, clash, attack, and domination among representatives of the Islamic, Christian, and Jewish philosophical traditions should be put aside as inadequately descriptive of the historical reality. Thinkers of these three traditions argued for their own understandings and

against those of others both within and outside their faith traditions. Rigorous argument, disagreement, refutation, and defense of philosophical and theological positions were common and very fruitful methods used inside each of the three traditions and should be seen as the methods by which philosophical and theological understanding advanced in sophistication and insight. The more appropriate and encompassing model is that of a common endeavor by philosophers and philosophical theologians of the three traditions to conciliate and reconcile secular science with the common principles of Judaism, Islam and Christianity.