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Anna Akasoy  
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# Renaissance Averroism and Its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe

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RENAISSANCE AVERROISM  
AND ITS AFTERMATH: ARABIC  
PHILOSOPHY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Anna Akasoy  
Guido Giglioni

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# Renaissance Averroism and Its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe

 Springer

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## Preface

Most of the articles in this volume were presented at the conference Renaissance Averroism and its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe, held in June 2008 at the Warburg Institute. We would like to thank the Warburg Institute for hosting the conference. We would also like to thank the Gerda Henkel Foundation, the British Academy, the Institute of Philosophy (School of Advanced Study, University of London) and the Cassamarca Foundation for supporting the conference and the publication of this volume. Finally, we would like to thank Raphaëlle Burns for her invaluable help during the last stages of the editorial work.



# Contents

<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	1
Guido Giglioni	

## Part I Middle Ages and Renaissance

<b>2 Averroes against Avicenna on Human Spontaneous Generation: The Starting-Point of a Lasting Debate</b> .....	37
Amos Bertolacci	
<b>3 Revisiting the 1552–1550 and 1562 Aristotle-Averroes Edition</b> .....	55
Charles Burnett	
<b>4 Humanism and the Assessment of Averroes in the Renaissance</b> .....	65
Craig Martin	
<b>5 Marsilio Ficino on Saturn, the Plotinian Mind, and the Monster of Averroes</b> .....	81
Michael J.B. Allen	
<b>6 The Transmutations of a Young Averroist: Agostino Nifo’s Commentary on the <i>Destructio Destructionum</i> of Averroes and the Nature of Celestial Influences</b> .....	99
Nicholas Holland	
<b>7 Intellectual Beatitude in the Averroist Tradition: The Case of Agostino Nifo</b> .....	125
Leen Spruit	
<b>8 Averroistic Themes in Girolamo Cardano’s <i>De Immortalitate Animorum</i></b> .....	145
José Manuel García Valverde	

**9 Phantasms of Reason and Shadows of Matter: Averroes’s Notion of the Imagination and Its Renaissance Interpreters** ..... 173  
 Guido Giglioni

**Part II The Early Modern Period**

**10 The Cambridge Platonists and Averroes** ..... 197  
 Sarah Hutton

**11 Reconsidering the Case of Elijah Delmedigo’s Averroism and Its Impact on Spinoza** ..... 213  
 Carlos Fraenkel

**12 Averroes and Arabic Philosophy in the Modern *Historia Philosophica*: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries** ..... 237  
 Gregorio Piaia

**13 Immanuel Kant, Universal Understanding, and the Meaning of Averroism in the German Enlightenment** ..... 255  
 Marco Sgarbi

**Part III Averroism and Modernity**

**14 Ernest Renan and Averroism: The Story of a Misinterpretation** ..... 273  
 John Marenbon

**15 Leo Strauss and the Alethiometer** ..... 285  
 James E. Montgomery

**16 Was Ibn Rushd an Averroist? The Problem, the Debate, and Its Philosophical Implications** ..... 321  
 Anna Akasoy

**Contributors** ..... 349

**Bibliography** ..... 353

**Name Index** ..... 381

**Subject Index** ..... 399

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Guido Giglioni

### Averroan, Averroist and Averroistic

Before launching into the discussions and debates at the heart of this volume, a number of disclaimers and caveats are in order. First of all, this is not primarily a book on Ibn Rushd, the renowned judge, physician and commentator of Aristotle who lived in twelfth-century al-Andalus, but on a cultural phenomenon known since the thirteenth century as Averroism. This is no terminological hair-splitting on our part: keeping this difference in mind while reading the book is crucial. That the commentator Ibn Rushd was also a thinker in his own right adds to the difficulties in disentangling the nature of the authorial intention in his work. Some initial terminological qualifications, we hope, will shed light on the linguistic and cultural complexities of the matter: in this volume, the name ‘Ibn Rushd’ denotes the actual historical figure, whereas his literary incarnation in translations and philosophical treatises of the Latin West will be referred to as ‘Averroes’. We have taken special care in distinguishing between ‘Averroan’, ‘Averroist’ and ‘Averroistic’ every time we thought it necessary to alert the reader to the constantly intersecting levels of history and historiography.

‘Averroan’ refers to any philosophical view that belongs directly to Ibn Rushd and is synonymous with ‘Rushdian’.<sup>1</sup> ‘Averroist’ refers to opinions held by any follower of Ibn Rushd in the Latin West during the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance

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<sup>1</sup> See Jean-Baptiste Brenet, *Transferts du sujet: La noétique d'Averroès selon Jean de Jandun* (Paris: Vrin, 2003), p. 16, n. 1: “‘Rushdien’ désigne ce qui ressortit à Averroès (et non à son interprétation latine), ou à Ibn Rushd (lorsqu’on fait référence à des oeuvres que les Latins n’avaient pas).” On the many cultural and linguistic complexities involving Averroes’s reception in the Latin West, see Alain de Libera, ‘Introduction’, in Averroès, *L’intelligence et la pensée. Sur le De anima*, ed. by A. de Libera (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), pp. 7–45.

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and – though less and less frequently – during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Finally, ‘Averroistic’ refers to the generic cultural label denoting a pronounced rationalistic attitude, of a vaguely Aristotelian ilk, towards questions of philosophical psychology (in particular, the nature of the human mind and its survival after the death of the body), natural determinism and, above all, the relationships between philosophical freedom and dogmatic truths, often of a religious kind.<sup>2</sup> Averroistic thinkers looked (and still look) at Averroes as the philosopher who denied the personal identity of human beings, of course, but also as an incarnation of Machiavellian dissimulation in politics and religion, as one of the heroes of the *libertinage érudit*, as a precursor of seventeenth-century materialism, as a pantheist and even an atheist.

It is the label ‘Averroistic’ that often makes historians of medieval and Renaissance philosophy uncomfortable.<sup>3</sup> And yet the perception of Ibn Rushd’s work as conveying a number of ‘Averroistic’ attitudes towards religion and politics lasted long after the sixteenth century and in fact reached its prime as late as the eighteenth century. As such, ‘Averroistic’ free-thinking and ‘erudite’ libertinism can legitimately be seen as part of early modern European culture, for cultural perceptions may at times be as significant as the original texts that, more or less obliquely, generated or inspired such perceptions. As is sometimes revealed by the long-term debate over what one should mean by ‘Averroism’, anxiety about philological and political correctness betrays greater concerns about the meaning of philosophy and historical research.

Another important qualification regards the terminological diversity that characterises the meanings of ‘intellect’ in Averroan and Averroist works. In this volume, the reader will encounter all sorts of intellects: material, passive, possible, potential, dispositional, acquired and agent. The following terse specifications are simply meant to provide a preliminary sketch, a vademecum in the uneven territories of Averroan noetics. In Averroes’s cosmos, intellects are many and differentiated according to their degree of perfection, i.e., ‘actuality’. Their function is to actualise, that is, bring to completion all sorts of processes that lie in a condition of potentiality. In so doing, intellects produce reality and increase the level of moral perfection (and therefore bliss) in the universe. The ‘material’ intellect is the universal receiver of all sublunary forms, a state of pure receptivity, and since in order to be a proper receiver, a receiver cannot have in itself anything of the received items, the material intellect is in fact immaterial. It is the universal repository of all the intelligibles shared by human knowing subjects. It is called ‘material’ because of its passive (*patibilis*) nature.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the active or agent intellect is unmixed, impassible

<sup>2</sup> As pointed out by Massimo Campanini, ‘an aura of militant intellectualism’ has always surrounded the many incarnations of Averroism in European culture. See his *Averroè* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, P. O. Kristeller, ‘Paduan Averroism and Alexandrism in the Light of Recent Studies’, in Id., *Renaissance Thought and the Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990 [1964, 1980]), pp. 111–118 (113).

<sup>4</sup> Jacopo Zabarella, *Liber de mente humana*, in *De rebus naturalibus libri XXX* (Frankfurt: Lazar Zetzner, 1607; repr. Frankfurt: Minerva, 1966), c. 963CDE. See also Tommaso Campanella, *Del senso delle cose e della magia*, ed. by Germana Ernst (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2007), p. 84: ‘seguirà che, uno intendendo una cosa, tutti l’intenderiano per l’unità dell’intelletto.’

and separate, defined by Averroes as *forma nobis*, a form *for* us, but not *in* us.<sup>5</sup> According to Averroist conventional wisdom, the intellect cannot be the substantial form of individual human beings. Averroes argued that there is one mind for all human beings, corresponding to the lowest intellect in the series of emanated intellects. Humankind thinks by being actualised by the lowest of the celestial intelligences. However, although they are not intellects, individual human souls can connect with the intellect (possible and even active) every time they engage in forms of abstract knowledge. The reward of this intellectual endeavour is that, together with cognitive clarity, human souls reach a state of intellectual beatitude. Mental happiness is the reward of intellectual work (*adeptio*). Further varieties in the motley crew of Renaissance intellects can be found in the rest of this volume.

Finally, a few words on what we may call the hermeneutical predicament at the heart of Averroes's philosophy and its reception: Aristotle, Ibn Rushd, Averroes and Averroist Aristotelians are constituent elements, all connected to each other, of what we might call an exegetical nebula, and yet Ibn Rushd is simultaneously more and less than Aristotle, Averroes more and less than Ibn Rushd, and medieval and early modern Averroist Aristotelians more and less than the simple sum of Aristotle and Ibn Rushd cum Averroes. The surplus of meaning generated in the shift from Aristotle to Ibn Rushd to Averroes and Averroist Aristotelianism has resulted in extraordinarily creative appropriations and reuses, while the contours separating the elements of the nebula remain nevertheless frustratingly blurry. It is certainly not an accident that 'who is who' has often been the question used by some historians in their attempts to downplay the issue of Averroism and the Averroists from the later Middle Ages to the early modern period.

## Early Modern Averroism: Why Bother?

A scholar of Islamic law and theology and Graeco-Arabic philosophy and medicine, Abū'l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Rushd, Latinised as Averroes, was born in 1126 in Cordoba into a renowned family of jurists, and died in Marrakesh in 1198. Court physician of the dynasty of the Almohads, who ruled over al-Andalus from 1147, he also worked as a judge and served in a number of important official positions. Around 1168, he wrote a treatise on law, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid wa-nihāyat al-muqtaṣid fī'l-fiqh* ('The Starting-Point of the Learned Man Engaged in an Effort of Personal Meditation and the Final Achievement of the Learned Person, Who is Balanced in Questions of Law'), in which he discussed the difficulties of dealing with the divergent opinions among Muslim jurists. It was in this period that he was introduced at court by the philosopher Abū Bakr ibn Ṭufayl (c. 1105–1185) and appointed as

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<sup>5</sup> Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, ed. F. Stuart Crawford (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1953) p. 485; *Long Commentary on the De anima of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Richard C. Taylor (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 387.

personal physician to the caliph Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf in 1182. Originally interested in logical and medical subjects, Ibn Rushd became increasingly engaged in other branches of philosophy. Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf, who apparently had a keen interest in Aristotelian philosophy, asked Ibn Rushd to produce an exhaustive and consistent corpus of exegetical companions to have a better understanding of Aristotle’s works. How to communicate elite knowledge to a lay audience was an important concern of the Almohad movement. Ibn Rushd addressed the problems of sharing allegorical interpretations of religious texts particularly in his legal and theological works composed between 1179 and 1180 – *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl wa-taqrīr mā bayna’l-sharī‘a wa’l-ḥikma min al-itṭisāl* (‘Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom’), *Kashf ‘an manāḥij al-adilla fī ‘aqā’id al-milla* (‘Uncovering the Methods of Proofs with Respect to the Beliefs of the Religious Community’) and *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (‘Incoherence of the Incoherence’, *Destructio destructionis*, in Latin). In Ibn Rushd’s view, conflicts originate in every field of human learning as a result of the fragmenting of truth into irreconcilable interpretations. Dominique Urvoy, among others, has highlighted the close relationship between Almohadism and Averroes’s philosophy.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Massimo Campanini has suggested that Averroes regarded philosophy as an activity directed towards different ends, an activity reliant on different approaches depending on the circumstances of its exercise. It seems safe to say that, as a courtier, a judge and a physician, Ibn Rushd looked at philosophy as the cornerstone of a larger cultural and political project.<sup>7</sup>

At a certain point during the thirteenth century, some of Ibn Rushd’s ideas began to trickle into the Latin West. The discovery of his formidable interpretation of Aristotle went hand in hand with the recovery of Aristotle’s own work, included as lemmata in Ibn Rushd’s long commentaries. The impact that this material had on the art masters in the main universities of Europe, especially in Paris, was momentous. Ibn Rushd became Averroes, i.e., the key to unlock the mysteries of the ‘master of those who know’, to quote Dante. Indeed, it must have felt as if in the course of a few decades the intellect of humankind had actualised an immense amount of latent knowledge; as a result, mental happiness spread from Paris to Bologna, from Oxford to Erfurt. Averroes arrived in the Latin West at different times. From Siger of Brabant to Immanuel Kant, Averroan, Averroist and Averroistic notions appeared and reappeared in the philosophical culture of early modern Europe. There may have been some episodes of historiographic hallucination, but a good number of Averroist sightings correspond to reality.

The arrival of Averroist interpretations of Aristotle in the philosophical republic of letters, however, was not always greeted with enthusiasm. This boldly original view of the cosmos and human knowledge proved irksome for many philosophers. The most disputed points included: the risk of reifying the activity of thought (for such an activity does not belong to individual cogitating human beings); the charge

<sup>6</sup> Dominique Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd (Averroes)* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Campanini, *Averroè*, p. 42.

of naturalistic determinism; an elitist view of human happiness; a condescending attitude towards the religious experience of ordinary people (for religion is a rhetorical dilution of truth accessible to the masses).

This volume intends to assess the impact that the reception of Averroist ideas had on the philosophical culture of the early modern period. Amos Bertolacci sets the stage by introducing the conflict between Avicenna and Averroes as reflected in the latter's criticism of the former's theories on human generation. This disagreement is symptomatic of different attitudes to the relationship between philosophy and religion. The following are some of the questions examined in subsequent contributions: What was Averroism in the early modern period? Who were the Averroists at the time (provided that any trace of Averroism or Averroists can still be detected in that period)? Or maybe, rephrasing the question in a way that allows us to avoid all trappings of conspiratorial Theorising: What were the perceptions of Averroism from the end of the Middle Ages to the end of the eighteenth century? And, closely related to this point, how were and are these perceptions dealt with historiographically? Our understanding of Averroism rests on an illustrious tradition of philosophical and historical research carried out by generations of eminent scholars, such as Martin Grabmann, Bruno Nardi, Fernand van Steenberghe, Anneliese Maier, René-Antoine Gauthier, Zdzisław Kuksewicz, Charles J. Ermatinger, Ruedi Imbach and Alain de Libera. And yet much work remains to be done, not only because medieval and early modern material is certainly still waiting to be unearthed somewhere, in both archives and books, ready to shed more light on the reception of Averroes's work, but also because the repercussions of Averroes's philosophy, and more generally, of Arabic philosophy on European culture, beyond all facile polemics about the persistence of a supposedly original template of Greco-Roman learning, still needs to be evaluated in all its scope. As the final chapters in this volume by John Marenbon, James Montgomery and Anna Akasoy demonstrate, Averroism remains a hot topic in the field of philosophical historiography.<sup>8</sup>

To complicate the story further, the reception of Ibn Rushd's philosophy in the Latin West can be seen as a tale of many creative misunderstandings. It certainly is an extraordinary case of philosophical acculturation, which, as this volume shows, lasted for some centuries after its beginning in the thirteenth century. Brian Copenhaver refers to the kind of Averroism criticised by Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) in his *Theologia Platonica* as a 'construct' largely assembled out of Aquinas's work.<sup>9</sup> In this volume, Michael Allen insists on the composite nature of Ficino's Averroes and Averroists, while in his chapter on 'Humanism and the Assessment of Averroes in the Renaissance', Craig Martin argues that during the Renaissance Averroes was perceived as a philosopher who had been acquainted with the Greek commentators and could therefore be considered as a reliable source by a good

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<sup>8</sup> See *infra* in this volume, John Marenbon, 'Ernest Renan and Averroism: The Story of a Misinterpretation'; James E. Montgomery, 'Leo Strauss and the Alethiometer'; Anna Akasoy, 'Was Ibn Rushd an Averroist? The Problem, the Debate, and its Philosophical Implications'.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Copenhaver, 'Ten Arguments in Search of a Philosopher: Averroes and Aquinas in Ficino's *Platonic Theology*', *Vivarium*, 47 (2009), pp. 444–479.

number of Renaissance authors.<sup>10</sup> The idea that Averroes followed Greek authors and commentators in his interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy was particularly appealing to Renaissance scholars who were in the process of recovering a more genuinely historical view of ancient philosophy.<sup>11</sup>

Averroism remained a term of philosophical insult long after the thirteenth century. Thus, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) could dismiss Kant's transcendental idealism as yet another incarnation of Averroism, as Marco Sgarbi shows in his chapter in this volume.<sup>12</sup> A long list of abuses worthy of Petrarch's rage can be found in an early Renaissance summa against Averroes written by Ambrogio Leone (1458/9–1525), a humanist from Nola, near Naples, and a correspondent of Erasmus, who in his youth had studied medicine and philosophy at Padua between 1477 and 1484 under Nicoletto Vernia (c. 1420–1499) and Agostino Nifo (ca. 1473–1538 or 1545). In 1517 he published his *Castigationes adversus Averroem* ('Emendations against Averroes') in 30 books (reprinted in 1524 and 1532). The opening epistle to the 'excellent reader' describes Averroes as a 'thief'.

Averroes went wrong in logic, philosophy, mathematics and other disciplines, and this happened partly because he interpreted Aristotle, Plato, other ancient philosophers and their interpreters in a wrong way, partly because he stole other people's sayings. These were not his own, but he introduced and presented them as if they were his own. Therefore, in this book not only will you have Averroes detected, convicted and reprehended as a thief; you will also get in the easiest way extensive and deep knowledge of logic and the art of language, of natural and divine things, and this in Latin and according to the precepts and teachings of the Aristotelian school.<sup>13</sup>

In his critique of the Averroist encyclopaedia, Leone seems to combine two principal anti-Averroist responses: humanist historicism and pristine Aristotelianism. His agenda is both rhetorical and metaphysical. In the dedicatory letter to Pope Leo X, Leone presents Averroes as a liar (*falsus homo*), an unreliable interpreter (*mendax interpres*), a corruptor of epistemological and ethical norms (*recti verique corruptor*), a defiler of the truth (*veritatis depravator*), impious (*impius*), a weak logician (*hebes*

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<sup>10</sup> See *infra* in this volume, Michael J. B. Allen, 'Marsilio Ficino on Saturn, the Plotinian Mind, and the Monster of Averroes'; Craig Martin, 'Humanism and the Assessment of Averroes in the Renaissance'.

<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Renaissance authors such as Tiberio Bacilieri and Girolamo Cardano did not find the presence of Themistian themes in Averroes particularly surprising. After all, ironic as they seem to us, eclectic accretions are the stuff of the history of human thought; 'it is more than a little ironic', writes Richard C. Taylor, that 'the foundational consideration that motivated this famous Aristotelian commentator is primarily derived from the Neoplatonic analysis of intellect provided by Themistius in his *Paraphrase of the De Anima*'. See Taylor, 'Intelligibles in Act in Averroes', in *Averroès et les averroïsmes juif et latin*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Brenet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 111–140 (140).

<sup>12</sup> See *infra* in this volume Marco Sgarbi, 'Immanuel Kant, Universal Understanding, and the Meaning of Averroism in the German Enlightenment'.

<sup>13</sup> Ambrogio Leone, 'Lector optime', in *Castigationes adversus Averroem* (Venice: Bernardino and Matteo Vitali, 1517) [no page number]. On Leone, see Leen Spruit, 'Leone, Ambrogio', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana: Rome, 1960–), LXIV, pp. 560–562.

*logicus*), an uncouth thinker (*crassus philosophus*) and a braggart (*audaculus*). But worst of all, according to Leone, was that Averroes hoped to make a name for himself in philosophy by ridiculing all the religions of the world. He who despises God, however, destroys ‘the first principle and author of everything’ and for this reason, in the end Averroes drowned in an ocean of lies (*in medio falsitatis pelago demersus*). To those who still believe that ‘Averroes is the soul of Aristotle’, Leone recommends the most recent developments in philosophical textual criticism and the newly restored exegetical expertise of the Greek commentators: ‘to the extent that Aristotelian loci might be understood in the clearest possible way and explained by Greek people, he decided to revise Averroes through the newly restored Alexander, Simplicius and Themistius.’<sup>14</sup>

History as a humanist discipline is an integral part of the story of Averroes’s reception in the early modern period. In this volume, the chequered career of Averroism in the emerging new genre of philosophical history is explored by Gregorio Piaia, in a chapter concerning Averroes’s place in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century histories of philosophy.<sup>15</sup> In Piaia’s opinion, among the reasons that led to the demise of the Averroist vision of nature, matter and human thinking, was Averroes’s close association with Aristotelianism and his reputation as an atheist in disguise. Piaia examines a wide variety of works – critical, erudite, belletristic and popular. From Georg Horn’s *Historiae philosophicae libri septem* (1655) to Johannes Gerhard Voss’s *De philosophia et philosophorum libri duo* (1657–1658), from Laurent Bordelon’s *Theatre philosophique* (1692) to André-François Boureau Deslandes’s *Histoire critique de la philosophie* (1737), the perception of Averroes and Arabic philosophy varied, sometimes even within the same treatise. Piaia concludes his thorough account by indicating two distinctive ways of understanding the genre of history of philosophy, the *historia philosophica*, in a Baylean and Bruckerian sense, as an inquiry that is both critically and philosophically engaged on the one hand, and the *histoire de l’esprit humain*, understood as a form of cultural study, attentive to the historical and religious details in the evolution of human thought on the other. In both cases, Averroism, understood as a comprehensive interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy, permutated, often insensibly, into Averroistic exercises in atheist dissimulation and libertine scepticism. One of the last works analysed by Piaia is the *Anleitung zur Historie der Leibnitzisch-Wolffischen Philosophie* (1737), by the German philosopher and physician Georg Volckmar Hartmann. Marco Sgarbi’s chapter starts from where Piaia’s ends. Sgarbi traces currents of Aristotelianism (more or less inflected in an Averroist or Averroistic sense) in Germany before Kant, and he confirms that at the end of the eighteenth century, being called an ‘Averroist’ could still be a cause for philosophical embarrassment.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the issues of dissimulation and double-truth still seem to affect the

<sup>14</sup> Ambrogio Leone to Pope Leo X, in Leone, *Castigationes adversus Averroem* [no page number].

<sup>15</sup> Gregorio Piaia, ‘Averroes and Arabic Philosophy in the Modern *Historia Philosophica*: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’.

<sup>16</sup> Sgarbi, ‘Immanuel Kant, Universal Understanding, and the Meaning of Averroism in the German Enlightenment’, in this volume, pp. 255–269.

contemporary debate about Averroism, and more generally Arabic philosophy. In her chapter on the notoriously complicated character of Ibn Rushd's Averroism, Anna Akasoy revisits the topic of 'the possible Averroist identity of Ibn Rushd.' She draws the attention of historians of medieval and early modern Averroism to the highly controversial nature of the current historiographic situation, in which sharply divided fronts of inquiry seem unable to come to terms with the results of their opponents' research: the 'Straussians', on the one hand, advocating a philosophically committed study of the history of philosophy, and the more philologically-alerted historians, on the other, who defend a study of Averroes's work centred on the documentary evidence provided by textual scholarship.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, with respect to the question of the dissemination of Averroist themes in the early Renaissance, besides the more evident intellectual reasons, one should consider three interrelated – technological, economical and institutional – aspects of the matter: the invention and diffusion of the printing press; the university establishment and its teaching methods; and finally, the rise of two philosophical literary genres, that of the philosophy textbook and that of the history of philosophy book. Charles B. Schmitt, in his seminal study on the 1550–1552 edition of Aristotle's oeuvre with Averroes's commentaries, published by the Giunta brothers in Venice (1550–1552), presented the work as a magnificent product of the synergy between book commerce and university-based philosophical research and teaching. In many respects, Averroes's popularity during the Renaissance greatly relied on his status as required reading in some Italian universities as well as on the growth of the printing press trade.<sup>18</sup> In this volume, Charles Burnett expands on the topic and returns to examine the famous edition by the Giunta brothers. As pointed out by Burnett, this edition represented the culmination of a particular way of reading and interpreting Aristotle, based on a systematic approach to knowledge, a particular emphasis on methodological issues, a predilection for philosophical arguments over questions of textual criticism, a very technical Latin jargon and little to no interest for the original Greek. Burnett looks at the prefatory materials as sources of information which may shed light on the cultural milieu that produced such a remarkable intellectual and material enterprise. He highlights the need to know more about the editors who prepared the texts for publication, such as Giovanni Battista Bagolino (d. 1552), Marco degli Oddi (1526–1591) and Romolo Fabio (fl. 1550s)<sup>19</sup> and compares the various editions (1550–1552, 1562, 1574, and another Venice reprint in 1560, but

<sup>17</sup> Anna Akasoy, 'Was Ibn Rushd an Averroist?', in this volume.

<sup>18</sup> Charles B. Schmitt, 'Renaissance Averroism Studied through the Venetian Editions of Aristotle-Averroes (with Particular Reference to the Giunta Edition of 1550–2)', originally in *L'averroismo in Italia* (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1979), pp. 121–142; repr. in Charles B. Schmitt, *The Aristotelian Tradition and Renaissance Universities* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), pp. 121–142; Copenhagen, 'Ten Arguments', p. 479.

<sup>19</sup> In 1676, in his *Les réflexions sur l'éloquence, la poétique, l'histoire et la philosophie*, the Jesuit René Rapin (1621–1687) wrote that Bagolino, Mantino and Zimara went to excruciatingly great lengths to fix Averroes's Latin text because he had been unable to understand the original meaning of Aristotle's ideas. See Gregorio Piaia's chapter in this volume.

by a different publisher, Comin da Trino). In particular, Burnett concentrates on the editorial work that Bernardino Tomitano (1517–1576) conducted on the logical books of the *Opera* and on the way in which different Latin translations of Averroes's commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* by Abraham de Balmes (ca. 1460–1523), Giovanni Francesco Burana of Verona (ca. 1475/80–after 1503) and Jacob Mantino ben Samuel (d. 1549) were organised and used in the various editions of the *Opera*. If in the first edition Bagolino and Degli Oddi managed to amalgamate the three versions into one Latin text, in the 1562 edition the text was distributed in three columns, an evolution that witnesses a deeper interest in expanding the philological and teaching resources of the text. Burnett concludes by contextualising Tomitano's contribution as a typical product of the philosophical and medical environment of the University of Padua. As a whole, the amount of work that Paduan teachers devoted to Averroes's and Aristotle's works on logic, especially the *Posterior Analytics* and its commentaries, is a clear indication of their interest in questions of method, from both a scientific and pedagogical point of view. What is more, we witness in Tomitano the slow erosion of the past tradition of reading Aristotle entirely in Latin, for he included a detailed philological commentary on *Posterior Analytics* in which the Greek text is cited throughout.<sup>20</sup>

Given the complex situation concerning the relationships between original texts, translations and editions, at times one has the impression that working on Latin Averroism looks more like an exercise in historical imagination, disciplined though it may be, than history of philosophy. And yet Ibn Rushd's writings and their European reception as Averroes's work are inextricably intertwined with the particular conditions in which they took their characteristic shape and the ways in which they were transferred to other cultural contexts. If we can draw one lesson from the study of the reception of the Averroan legacy and the historiography of Averroism, it is that we need to keep interpreting. Which in the end sounds like a characteristically Averroan precept, coming from a philosopher who deemed hermeneutical exercise to be a fundamental activity to preserve the cohesion of human communities and the growth of knowledge.

## Who Were the Early Modern Averroists?

The question concerning the identity of Averroists appeared frequently in the annals of medieval and early modern philosophy, from Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). We have already hinted at the fact that Herder called Kant an Averroist an accusation hotly debated at the end of the eighteenth century. The hunt for actual followers of Averroes's philosophy is, however, a different matter. Identifying real, historical cases of militant and practising Averroism presupposes that there existed among Latin interpreters of Ibn

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Burnett, 'Revisiting the 1552–1550 and 1562 Aristotle-Averroes Edition'.

Rushd a set of doctrines that could be described as unambiguously Averroist. In the last century, Fernand van Steenberghen described Averroism as an intellectual phenomenon that mainly belonged to the fourteenth century, for before that date even radical Aristotelians such as Siger of Brabant (ca. 1240–1280s) did not possess a sufficiently clear understanding of Averroes's contribution to Aristotle's work.<sup>21</sup> Recently, Dag Nikolaus Hasse has argued that 'Averroism became a movement in the fullest sense in the decades around 1500, when, in addition to all internal and external evidences, there is testimony of a doctrinal debate about the correct interpretation of Averroes.'<sup>22</sup> From this perspective, in order for a philosopher to be considered a fully-fledged Averroist, he (in the period in question it was always a 'he') had to be aware of the hermeneutical predicament underlying the reception of Ibn Rushd's work. Post-Rushdian Averroism and Averroists presuppose a condition of interpretative reflexivity, without which to be an 'Averroist' falls short of naivety, both in a subjective sense (Siger in Van Steenberghen's interpretation, for he didn't even know what to be a real Averroist was supposed to mean at the time) and in an objective sense (as a polemical straw-man, like in Ficino's use of 'Averroists' as mortalist Aristotelians).

For all these reflexive and exegetical intricacies, a set of doctrinal positions that may qualify the sense of what to be a medieval or early modern Averroist may mean in those periods can however be identified. We have already mentioned the most famous (and notorious) of these positions: the unicity of the intellect for all human beings, the eternity of the world and the theory of the double truth. John Marenbon has recently provided a useful working definition of the late medieval 'Averroist', which can be extended to describe his Renaissance counterpart. The Averroist, he says, are those Latin thinkers who

- (a) accepted Averroes's view that there is only a single possible intellect;
- (b) concentrated their efforts on reaching and examining an accurate account of Aristotle's ideas – usually based on that presented by Averroes – even where these positions are incompatible with Christian teaching; and usually
- (c) adopted some sort of strategy to explain why they, though Christians, did (a) and (b).<sup>23</sup>

So who were the Averroists? In some cases, we have names. But more often than not, 'Averroist' seems to have been used as a generic tag to label a particular attitude towards Aristotelian doctrines. For some historians there has never been a single

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<sup>21</sup> Fernand van Steenberghen, *Les œuvres et la doctrine de Siger de Brabant* (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1938); Id., *Introduction à l'étude de la philosophie médiévale* (Louvain and Paris: Publications Universitaires; Béatrice Nauwelaerts, 1974), pp. 531–554; Id., *Maître Siger de Brabant* (Louvain and Paris: Publications Universitaires; Vander Oyez, 1977).

<sup>22</sup> Dag Nikolaus Hasse, 'Averroica secta: Notes on the Formation of Averroist Movements in Fourteenth-Century Bologna and Renaissance Italy', in *Averroès et les averroïsmes juif et latin*, pp. 307–331 (308).

<sup>23</sup> John Marenbon, 'Dante's Averroism', in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. John Marenbon (Leiden, Boston and Cologne: Brill, 2001), pp. 349–374.

actual Averroist. Averroism was used as an Aristotelian bugbear to be agitated as a spectre of irreligiousness and metaphysical aberration. Later, especially after the Enlightenment, Averroes became a beacon of secular free-thinking and its acolytes were characterised as clandestine agents of demythologising rationalism. Given the many permutations that the term ‘Averroist’ underwent during the early modern period, it is perhaps easier and safer to identify actual Averroists who operated during the Middle Ages. Thanks to the research of Martin Grabmann, Anneliese Maier and Zdzisław Kuksewicz among others, historians have come up with a list of names: Gentile of Cingoli (fl. 1290), Giles of Orleans (fl. 1290), Ferrandus of Spain (fl. 1290), John of Jandun (ca. 1285–1323), Anthony of Parma (fl. 1320), Taddeo of Parma (fl. 1320), Angelo of Arezzo (fl. 1325), Matteo of Gubbio (fl. 1330), John of Göttingen (ca. 1295–1340), Giacomo of Piacenza (fl. 1340), Peter of Modena (fl. 1340), John Baconthorpe (ca. 1290–1347), Theodoric of Magdeburg (fl. 1350), Henry of Wesalia (fl. 1360), Hermann of Winterswijk (fl. 1360), Hermann of Erfurt (fl. 1360).<sup>24</sup> Averro-sceptics, however, will always take advantage of the already mentioned hermeneutical predicament (Ibn Rushd-Aristotle-Averroes-Averroists) to question the real existence of both Averroism and Averroists. Facetiously, P. O. Kristeller once remarked that, ‘[i]f we call Averroists only those Aristotelians who agree with Averroes on the interpretation of every single passage in Aristotle, there hardly ever was a single Averroist. If we call Averroist any thinker who took any views from Averroes’s commentaries, there hardly was a single Aristotelian who could not be thus called an Averroist.’ Because of this generalised ambiguity in the use of the term ‘Averroism’, Kristeller’s conclusion was that ‘we are forced either to abandon the term Averroism altogether, or to limit it to those few thinkers who accepted the unity of the intellect, or finally to use it arbitrarily for that broad group of thinkers who pursued Aristotelian philosophy apart from theology and whom we might better describe as secular Aristotelians.’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Anneliese Maier, ‘Wilhelm von Alnwicks Bologneser Quaestionen gegen den Averroismus’, in *Ausgehendes Mittelalter: Gesammelte Aufsätze geistesgeschichte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, 3 vols (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1964–1977), I, pp. 1–40; Ead., ‘Ein unbeachteter “Averroist” des 14. Jahrhunderts: Walter Burley’, in *Ibid.*, pp. 101–121; Ead., ‘Die Bologneser Philosophen des 14. Jahrhunderts’, *Ibid.*, II pp. 335–349; Zdzisław Kuksewicz, *Averroïsme bolonais au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Wrocław, Warsaw and Krakow: Ossolineum, 1965); Id., *De Siger de Brabant à Jacques de Plaisance: La théorie de l’intellect chez les Averroïstes latins des XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Wrocław, Warsaw and Krakow: Ossolineum, 1968); Id., ‘La découverte d’une école averroïste inconnue: Erfurt’, in *Averroès et les averroïsmes juif et latin*, pp. 299–306; René-Antoine Gauthier, ‘Notes sur les débuts (1225–1240) du premier “averroïsme”’, *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, 66 (1982), pp. 321–374; Luca Bianchi, ‘“Reducing Aristotle’s Doctrine to Simple Truth”: Cesare Crivellati and His Struggle against the Averroists’, in *Christian Readings of Aristotle from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. by Luca Bianchi (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 397–424.

<sup>25</sup> P. O. Kristeller, ‘Paduan Averroism and Alexandrism in the Light of Recent Studies’, pp. 114–115.

This point leads us to the heart of the difficulty concerning the identity of early modern Averroists. For some historians, such authors as Paolo Nicoletti of Udine, known as Paul of Venice (ca. 1369–1429), Niccolò Tignosi (1402–1474), the young Nicoletto Vernia, Alessandro Achillini (1463–1512), the young Agostino Nifo, Luca Prassicio (d. 1533), Antonio Bernardi (1502–1565) and Francesco Vimercato (1512–1571) can be viewed as loyal followers of the Averroist reading of Aristotle’s philosophy. Other authors are Averroists in a much looser sense. In general, however, the picture seems to be far more uneven than labels such as ‘Renaissance Averroism’ may suggest. A variety of Averroist currents existed in the period: Sigerian trends (Alessandro Achillini, the young Nifo and Tiberio Bacilieri, who taught in Padua and Pavia in the early years of the sixteenth century); the intriguingly eclectic Averroism of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), mediated through a number of different sources; a form of Averroism we might call ‘pragmatic’, where Averroes’s commentaries continued to be used as an indispensable teaching tool, as is often the case with Marcantonio Zimara (1475–1535) or even Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525); currents of mystical Averroism; Simplician readings of Averroes, full of references to Theophrastus and Themistius, as in Marcantonio Genua (1491–1563), Francesco Piccolomini (1523–1607) and Girolamo Cardano (1501–1576).

In all probability, the most popular version of Renaissance Averroism was the interpretation defined by Bruno Nardi as ‘Sigerian’, to which the Italian scholar devoted a series of important studies between the 1910s and the 1950s. According to Nardi, the solution that Siger had outlined in his *De anima intellectiva* around 1270 became the standard position among fourteenth-century Averroist masters of arts in Paris and Bologna.<sup>26</sup> In Siger’s interpretation, the intellect was a separate substance, one for the whole human species, and was joined to single individuals through a substantial union, which constituted the form and final actualisation of the human being. Along similar lines, in the first half of the fifteenth century, Paul of Venice argued that the existence of individual intellective souls conflicted with the principle of natural economy (*natura nihil facit frustra*): the human species being one, there was no need to multiply countless intellects for each single human being.<sup>27</sup> However, the Sigerian explanation of the substantial union between the intellect and the human soul questioned the very unity of the human compound, understood as a vital and cognitive subject. In his *In libros de anima explanatio* (1415–1420), Paul of Venice summed up the problem by introducing the idea of a double soul: ‘The human being, apart from the partial souls [vegetative and sensitive], has two total souls, i.e., the sensitive cogitative, which is generable and corruptible, and performs functions of inherence and information, and the intellective one, perpetual and

<sup>26</sup> Bruno Nardi, *Sigieri di Brabante nel pensiero del Rinascimento italiano* (Rome: Edizioni Italiane, 1945); Id., *Saggi sull’aristotelismo padovano dal secolo XIV al XVI* (Florence: Sansoni, 1958); Zdzisław Kuksewicz, ‘The Latin Averroism of the Late Thirteenth Century’, in *Averroism in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance*, ed. Friedrich Niewöhner and Loris Sturlese (Zürich: Spur, 1994), pp. 101–113.

<sup>27</sup> Paul of Venice, *Summa philosophiae naturalis* (Venice: Heirs of Ottaviano Scoto, 1503), f. 88, quoted in Nardi, *Sigieri di Brabante nel pensiero del Rinascimento italiano*, p. 125.

eternal, which informs but does not inhere.’ This meant that a human being is not human in an absolute sense (*praecise*) because of the cogitative soul, nor is he such because of the intellective soul, but as a result of both souls at the same time (*per ambas simul*).<sup>28</sup> Writing in 1518, after his ‘Averroist phase’, Agostino Nifo was still referring to the Sigerian interpretation when he described the Averroists as those philosophers who ‘say that the intellective soul is a whole (*totum quoddam*) constituted by the intellect and the sensitive and vegetative principle.’ Nifo introduced the term and notion of *semianima* to denote this particular view:

The intellect is indeed a part of the intellective soul. They imagine that the intellect is as it were a semi-soul (*semianima*), which is one half of the intellective soul; the whole thing that is transmitted by the seed is the other half of the intellective soul. The intellective soul as a whole results from these semi-souls, as it were, and it is individualised (*numeratur*) in human beings, although the intellect, which is a semi-soul of the intellective soul, is one in number in everyone (*unus numero sit in omnibus*).<sup>29</sup>

In keeping with Siger of Brabant and Paul of Venice, Agostino Nifo considered the cogitative soul and the intellective soul as two distinct forms, but joined together so closely and intimately that they completed each other and constituted one single living and thinking individual.<sup>30</sup>

The greatest difficulty with the post-Sigerian model of the dual soul was how to explain both human selfhood and its vital union with the body. Are we all, perhaps, one single human being? Among the philosophers who in the Renaissance were more sympathetic to Averroes’s solution, Achillini thought that he could circumvent the difficulty by claiming that, while reason is one in number for all human beings and acts as a *forma assistens* (i.e., acting from the outside, in a completely immaterial fashion, without informing the ensouled compound), this same reason constitutes as many different individuals as are the cogitative powers to which it is connected. In this view, the universal mind belonging to the whole human species was deemed to be instantiated by each individual’s history of images and memories. Like Siger, Paul of Venice and the young Nifo, Achillini maintained that a human being had two forms, i.e., the cogitative faculty and the intellect, and that the cogitative form had sufficient cognitive capacity to be actualised by the intellect. In *De elementis* (1505), he acknowledged the dual status of human nature and that there were two ‘principles of knowledge’ (*principia cognoscendi*) in human beings:

the one has a universal scope and it is the intellect, incorporeal, inorganic [i.e., with no corresponding anatomical seat] and incorruptible; the other is of a particular nature and it is the sentient power (*sensus*), a faculty in the body, with an anatomical basis, and it is the cogitative soul.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Paul of Venice, *In libros de anima explanatio* (Venice: Heirs of Ottaviano Scoto, 1504), fol. 46, quoted in Nardi, *Sigieri di Brabante nel pensiero del Rinascimento italiano*, p. 118.

<sup>29</sup> Agostino Nifo, *De immortalitate anime libellus* (Venice: Ottaviano Scoto, 1518), c. 4, quoted in Nardi, *Sigieri di Brabante nel pensiero del Rinascimento italiano*, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Nardi, *Sigieri di Brabante nel pensiero del Rinascimento italiano*, pp. 13–20, 125.

<sup>31</sup> Alessandro Achillini, *De elementis* (Venice: Giovanni Antonio de Benedetti, 1505), f. 127<sup>b</sup>, quoted in Nardi, *Saggi sull’aristotelismo padovano*, p. 245.

Averroist philosophical anthropology, despite all its difficulties in preserving the identity of the mental-bodily compound (or perhaps precisely for this reason), vindicated human diversity. In keeping with Averroes, Achillini looked at the intellect as the culmination of the process of actualisation occurring in the human soul. However, he also insisted that a human being was not to be seen ‘as the result of a simple form,’ but as a ‘very composite form’ (*forma compositissima*). His conclusion was that humans had two natures: ‘one is material and derives from the cogitative faculty, the other is divine and derives from the possible intellect.’<sup>32</sup> This dual model, quite common among Averroist Aristotelians of the period, and later appropriated and transformed by philosophers who were interested in providing the human soul with a naturalistic foundation, such as Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588), Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), was precisely the kind of solution that failed to convince those who advocated the human soul as both an individual self and a vital principle. Among the latter, Ficino maintained that the radical way in which Averroes had interpreted the notion of imagination had irredeemably disrupted the unity of the intellect’s form. In his opinion, the idea of a form characterised by a dual nature – a *compositum* made up of intelligible species and *phantasmata* – remained an ontological monstrosity. What is more, because of its representative suppleness, the imagination had been made too relevant by the Averroists.<sup>33</sup>

Against the post-Sigerian model of the dual soul, with the imagination playing the role of a key faculty, Jacopo Zabarella (1533–1589), a later Aristotelian of the Paduan school, argued the opposite case:

it is the last form [i.e., the intellect] that contracts and determines the previous ones [*imaginativa* and *cogitativa*], rather than being contracted and determined by one of these. Therefore, one should say that the rational soul determines and circumscribes the imaginative faculty rather than being circumscribed by it.<sup>34</sup>

It should be said that Averroes had clearly acknowledged that the cognitive scope of the imagination was not sufficient to grasp the content of the intellect. For Zabarella, however, Averroes and his followers had tried to solve the problem of how to explain the transition from the senses to the intellect by ambiguously (and illegitimately) expanding the powers of the imagination. In referring to the traditional distinction between *forma informans* and *forma assistens*, i.e., the distinction between the form that establishes a substantial union with the informed matter and the form that governs the subjected matter without being involved with the task of producing a material union out of the two entities, Zabarella argued that Averroes’s model of cogitative power could not explain both the ‘informing’

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 245–246.

<sup>33</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, eds and trans. Michael J. B. Allen and James Hankins, with W. Bowen, 6 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001–2006), V, p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> Zabarella, *Liber de mente humana*, c. 965A.

and the ‘assisting’ operations of the soul. Averroes, he wrote, argued that the cogitative faculty (*cogitativa*) is a human being’s specific *forma informans*, which defines the genus ‘animal’ as a human species (*quae dat homini esse specificum sub genere animali*), so that a human being is human ‘because of this faculty, and not because of the intellect.’ In Zabarella’s history of the Averroist reception of Aristotelianism, medieval and Renaissance Averroists had contributed to transform Averroes’s *cogitativa* into the highest form of imagination (*phantasia*), i.e., rational human imagination. In doing so, they could claim that ‘this cogitative faculty of Averroes was in fact the imagination referred to by Aristotle.’ Through the cogitative power, Zabarella pointed out, the Averroists had been successful in differentiating human from nonhuman animals. Being ‘the highest degree of the imaginative faculty, indeed, the peak of the whole sentient part of the soul’, the cogitative power constituted ‘the very species of man within the animal genus and distinguishes him from the rest of the animals.’ On the other hand, Averroes’s attempt to save the specific nature of human rationality when compared with the intellect was for Zabarella much less successful. He reminded the reader that on that critical passage in Aristotle’s *De anima* (III, text 20), Averroes had unambiguously embraced Themistius, who had characterised the ‘passive intellect’ as ‘one in number for the whole human species’, had ‘placed in man another soul, subject to multiplication’, and ‘by this soul’ had meant ‘the imaginative faculty of man’, which, in his opinion ‘had the power to receive the intellect’ and this was the highest perfection for man.<sup>35</sup>

Among the difficulties traditionally associated with the Averroist notion of the imagination, Ficino questioned the necessity to postulate that the intellect needed to borrow images from the cogitative soul of human beings, especially if it was true that the intellect ‘always perceives bodies in their causes.’ Indeed, if one looks at the matter from an Avicennian point of view, it would be more appropriate for the one mind to lend knowledge to us rather than for it to borrow knowledge from us. What is the point for the intellect to look for knowledge within our cogitative faculty? Will it become more perfect by lowering itself to the level of our imaginations? This cognitive lowering is certainly not an option for the intellect, for its descent in the hustle and bustle of sublunary life would be at variance with its lofty nature.<sup>36</sup> In the end, the whole process of clinging to human imaginations would represent for the intellect a degrading experience, or a ludicrously capricious activity, in which an allegedly eternal ‘contemplator of things’ chases and is chased by false images.<sup>37</sup> Provocatively, Ficino concluded his critique by asking why ‘such a divine mind, like a lackey, will everywhere accompany this bumbling little man who hardly ever uses his own mind.’<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, cc. 919–920.

<sup>36</sup> Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, V, pp. 113, 115.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

## It Is In Fact All About the Intellect (but with Important Qualifications)

It cannot be denied that Averroes is mostly remembered in the history of Western philosophy for his theory of the unicity of the possible intellect – and rightly so, we may add, for two fundamental reasons: firstly, because the solution given by Averroes to the problem of human knowledge is indeed exceptionally sophisticated and original; secondly, for the very simple reason that, for an Aristotelian like Averroes, reality *qua* reality is in fact intellect. Aristotle's and Averroes's philosophies share the ontological view that intellect is the highest level of reality. And in both cases the identification of the intellect with the ultimate reality of things has important consequences in the domains of moral philosophy, logic and natural philosophy. Historians have privileged the field of philosophical psychology, but, as this volume will show, Averroes's ideas in terms of matter theory, cosmology, hermeneutics, religion and politics continued to resonate for some time during the early modern period. It is important to keep in mind that, both as a philosopher and as an interpreter, Averroes believed in epistemological realism and physical naturalism, and as a result thought – both in the sublunary human variety and in the supralunary nonhuman one – was supposed to mirror and reproduce the actual structures of reality. The intellect describes nature as it is in its real nature because there is demonstrative knowledge only of that which really exists.<sup>39</sup>

Averroes's corpus of exegetical and speculative works is marked by a distinctive level of logical stringency and systematic comprehensiveness. As we have already noted, these aspects contributed to the irresistible appeal of Averroism to the minds of many philosophers, from the Middle Ages to the modern period. This unique combination of rigour and abstraction, however, also led to a series of counterintuitive albeit cogent philosophical theses. It must be said that Averroes's demonstrations concerning the intellect in particular have something of an uncanny clarity, to the point that some of the conclusions read like excerpts from a bizarre book of metaphysical science-fiction. Here are some of the most unsettling tenets, in the form of a list: The material intellect is described as a 'fourth kind of reality' (*quartum genus*), being neither a form, nor matter, nor finally a compound of form and

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<sup>39</sup> On Averroes's noetics, see Miguel Cruz Hernández, *Historia del pensamiento en el Andalus*, 2 vols (Sevilla: Editoriales Andaluzas Unidas, 1985), II, pp. 71ff; Alain de Libera, 'Existe-il une noétique "averroïste"? Note sur la réception latine d'Averroès au XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Averroismus in Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, eds Friedrich Niewöhner and Loris Sturlese (Zurich: Spur, 1994), pp. 51–80; Luca Bianchi, 'Filosofi, uomini e bruti: Note per la storia di un'antropologia averroista', in Id., *Studi sull'aristotelismo del Rinascimento* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2003), pp. 41–61; Antonio Petagine, *Aristotelismo difficile: L'intelletto umano nella prospettiva di Alberto Magno, Tommaso d'Aquino e Sigieri di Brabante* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2004); Richard C. Taylor, 'The Agent Intellect as "Form for Us" and Averroes's Critique of al-Fârâbî', *Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics*, 5 (2005), pp. 18–32; Campanini, *Averroè*, pp. 47–57.

matter, but a unique ontological hybrid, partly actualiser, partly receptor, capable, that is, of activity and receptivity at once.<sup>40</sup> This paradoxical activity of actualising while receiving, which can be extended to all immaterial forms, also known as intelligibles in actuality, can be seen as a coincidence of ‘intellecting’ and ‘intellected’ activity. If the intellect is the object of the very activity of understanding (for an intellect is a form in which the understood thing and the activity of understanding coincide), why does the intellect need an object that is different from the very act of understanding? From this point of view, Avicenna’s way with the intellect seems more plausible than Averroes’s. Moreover, what is the point of an external world? Even more puzzling, what is the point of an individual self? If the cogitative power is simply an evolution of the internal senses, are human beings really different from nonhuman animals? Why should the soul be united to the body? How can the human mind join the intelligences and even God’s intellect? Would it be correct to say that ecstasy is the highest form of knowledge? These are all indeed quite extraordinary philosophical statements, and it is not surprising that they caused a certain stir among medieval and early modern philosophers.

Philosophers reacted to the paradoxical nature of some of Averroes’s tenets by accentuating their radical aspect. Ever since Thomas Aquinas decided to counter the principles of Averroes’s theory of the intellect by resorting to powerful images in addition to logical arguments, these images of a strikingly counterintuitive force grew into an established repertoire of *loci communes* in medieval and early modern philosophical literature: the intellect acts as a ghost ship, a mechanical contraption, a demon who possesses the mind of individual human beings, a wall capable of perceiving the colours that are reflected on it.<sup>41</sup> Ficino expanded on the anti-Averroistic imagery. He compared the Averroist intellect to a monstrous octopus with a giant head and countless tentacles which fall and grow incessantly in accordance to the individual imaginations on which it feeds. These images had the rhetorical function of highlighting the absurd claim that human thinking is the act of being thought by another intellect. Human beings do not ‘intellect’, they are ‘intellected’, and what is more, they do not even know that they undergo this unremitting process of ‘being intellected’. Indeed, they are led to believe that they are in control of their own thinking activity. The absolute objectification and reification of human thinking – man is an object and not a subject of thought – was the aspect of Averroes’s philosophy that was perceived almost from the very beginning in the Latin West as the most distasteful. In the first decades of seventeenth century, the Italian philosopher Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639) could reiterate this point while defending the view that sense knowledge is more original than any intellectual abstraction: ‘if the intellect understands, then we don’t understand. And yet the intellect needs the species that derive from our senses in order for it to understand them by itself. Thus

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<sup>40</sup> Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, p. 409; *Long Commentary on the De anima of Aristotle*, p. 326.

<sup>41</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*, in *Aquinas against the Averroists: On There Being Only One Intellect*, ed. Ralph McInerny (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1993), p. 87; Zabarella, *Liber de mente humana*, c. 928B.

we will be the object and not the subject of understanding.<sup>42</sup> In a way, the Averroist intellect, precisely because of its lofty and impassible nature promoted forms of radical sentience in the sublunary world and confined impersonal objectivity to the level of supralunary knowledge.

This argument, it should be pointed out, has had a striking force of persistence in the history of philosophy and is closely connected to the recurrent charge of being anti-historical which has been levelled at the Averroist reason. Still in 1926, in the famous essay that Ernst Cassirer wrote for Aby Warburg's sixtieth birthday, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* ('The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy'), he interpreted Renaissance Averroism as the final outcome of hazily defined medieval tendencies towards 'objectification' (*Prozeß der Objektivierung*). While for Cassirer the Neokantian, Petrarch (1304–1374) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) belonged to the side of the 'individual', Averroes was definitely a representative of philosophical views oriented towards the 'cosmos'.<sup>43</sup> Since Petrarch's times, humanists and moral philosophers have viewed the Averroist interpretation of Aristotle as a form of externalist drift towards the universal life of the cosmos, away from the soul and its introspective focus. Objectification, though, does not mean objectivity. In keeping with Themistius, one of Averroes's powerful arguments in favour of the existence of one material intellect for all human beings was the assumption that, without presupposing the existence of this intellect, there would be no possibility of sharing the universal import of individual thoughts, there would be no correspondence between knowledge and reality and no possibility of communication among different minds. In the Arabic translation of Themistius's paraphrase of Aristotle's *De anima*, Averroes had found the key statement that 'if we do not have one intellect in which we all share, then we also do not have understanding of one another.'<sup>44</sup> At the end of the sixteenth century, Zabarella summed up the point in the following way:

If the passive (*patibilis*) intellect is multiplied, then the various acts of understanding (*intellectiones*), too, are multiplied, that is to say, my and your understanding of the same thing will be entirely different in number. If this is the case, it also follows that an intelligible presupposes an intelligible and that, too, implies another intelligible, in an infinite regress.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Campanella, *Del senso delle cose e della magia*, p. 84: 's'egli intende, non intendemo noi; ma le spezie del nostro senso servono a lui per intenderle da sé, e noi saremo oggetto, non soggetto d'intendimento.'

<sup>43</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, 1927), pp. 133–149; Id. *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), pp. 126–141.

<sup>44</sup> *An Arabic Translation of Themistius' Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, ed. M. C. Lyons (Oxford: Cassirer, 1973), pp. 188–189; quoted by Richard C. Taylor, in his 'Intelligibles in Act in Averroes', p. 128.

<sup>45</sup> Zabarella, *Liber de mente humana*, c. 963CDE. See also Alessandro Achillini, *Quolibeta de intelligentiis* (Bologna: Benedetto Faelli, 1494), fol. 10, quoted in Nardi, *Saggi sull'aristotelismo padovano*, p. 204; Campanella, *Del senso delle cose e della magia*, p. 84: 'seguirà che, uno intendendo una cosa, tutti l'intenderiano per l'unità dell'intelletto.'

The result indicated by Zabarella amounted to a dramatic crisis of intelligibility at the very heart of the theory of knowledge. To quote Zabarella again: ‘my act of understanding is not yours, and when I understand, other men do not necessarily understand the same thing.’ Averroes thought he could solve this difficulty by maintaining the diversity and multiplicity of human imaginations on the one hand, and by resorting to the unity of the intellect to unify their scattered *intentiones*, on the other. As aptly recapitulated by Zabarella, ‘the intellect in many human beings is one ... their imaginations are different.’<sup>46</sup> However, for all cognitive acrobatics imposed on the imagination, in Averroes’s cosmos ultimately individual human beings seemed to be left without a real thinking faculty. They acquired knowledge of the world through the *cogitativa*, but ‘cogitating’ for Averroes was not the same as ‘thinking’. In the sublunary world the cogitative faculty is the culmination of the representative activity of the senses, both external and internal. Within the sphere of animal sentience, the *cogitativa* is what makes the human being a living creature that is different from both nonhuman earthly animals and nonhuman celestial animals. On this point, the difference with Pomponazzi is subtle but clear: for Pomponazzi, although human beings cannot think without relying on their imaginations, nevertheless, their thinking remains a form of intellectual activity; for Averroes, the imagination is still an indispensable provider of objects, but it remains a surrogate of thought, the most refined form of animal knowledge in the sublunary world.

It then becomes clear why Ficino criticised Averroes so harshly for reducing ‘the images of things shining in the cogitative power’ to mere ‘occasions’ for the mind to understand.<sup>47</sup> In doing so, Averroes had transformed human knowledge into an unstable, provisional and episodic flow of images conveyed by the cogitative faculty. If one accepted the premises of Averroes’s explanation, Ficino went on, then human beings were constantly feeding the one mind with their imaginary worlds, unaware of their role as indefatigable suppliers of images.<sup>48</sup> As if manipulated by the intellect, human imaginations were part of a grand cosmological plan meant to bring the material intellect of the sublunary world to full actualisation. The cunning of supralunary reason proceeded through the absorption of sublunary imaginations. This intellect, portrayed by Ficino as an insatiable mind that scanned and scoured men’s cogitative recesses in search of all sorts of information concerning the world of nature and human beings, went so far as to pry into the mind of the wisest of men in order to increase the level of intelligibility in the sublunary world. In the great scheme of things, the sages of humankind turned therefore into accomplices in a process of universal enlightenment rather than conscious and responsible thinking subjects.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Zabarella, *Liber de mente humana*, c. 965D: ‘unus sit intellectus in pluribus hominum ... phantasmata in iis diversa sunt.’

<sup>47</sup>Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, V, pp. 19–21.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

## The End of the Intellect

As already pointed out, it cannot be denied that, as a form of Aristotelianism, Averroes's philosophy is centred on the intellect and that the intellect is in the end the highest reality. And yet we should always resist the temptation to reduce Averroes's philosophy and Averroism as a philosophical current to a mere epistemological account of the intellect. Indeed, one of the reasons why tracing the evolution of Averroist ideas during the early modern period matters from both a historical and a philosophical point of view is that this development signals the end of a certain way of understanding the intellect and its role in both human knowledge and the universe. As Luca Bianchi and Eugenio Randi remind us, 'Aristotelianism came with a physics and a cosmology, and this was precisely one of the principal reasons for its success'.<sup>50</sup> The end of the intellect, understood as the principle of intelligibility of both the sublunary and supralunary worlds, meant therefore the end of a cosmological link between *knowledge* and *reality*. Galileian, Cartesian and Lockean standards of intelligibility (to mention only a few) contributed to releasing the intellect from its cosmological duties, transforming metaphysics into a set of epistemological problems. In this, the evolution of the Averroist intellect in early modern thought is part of a larger story concerning the gradual dissociation of reality from the very conditions of its intelligibility. As aptly put by F. Edward Cranz, 'the experience of what was called the intellect changed so fundamentally between the late ancient period and the Renaissance that the discussions took place between within two almost completely different contexts of experience', on the one hand a universe of things, on the other, a universe of meanings (*intentiones*): 'the single realm of Greek thought and experience is split into the two medieval-modern universes of meanings and things.'<sup>51</sup>

It must be said that the strong emphasis placed by the Renaissance Averroists on the nonhuman character of the intellect contributed to extending the gap between the human soul and the universal conditions of intelligibility. By inserting the cogitative faculty among the internal senses of the human soul, Averroes's followers confirmed the rift between the theory of the intellect and the theory of the soul: the intellect does not belong to human beings, whose cognitive expertise consists in a cogitative elaboration of sense perceptions. Again, early modern Averroism could foster empiricism in the field of human and natural knowledge, while relegating the intellect to the rarefied regions of supralunary metaphysics. Ficino was convinced that one of the most abhorrent consequences resulting from the Averroist model of the mind was a general flattening of the intellectual life of the universe, such that 'the higher forms are in a manner remitted and driven down towards the lower forms', while 'the lower forms are intensified and lifted up towards the higher.'<sup>52</sup> In other words, Averroes's *copulatio* (i.e., the connection between the human soul and

<sup>50</sup> Luca Bianchi and Eugenio Randi, *Le verità dissonanti* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1990), p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Cranz, 'Two Debates about the Intellect', pp. 1, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, V, p. 121.

the intellect) came with a (not so hidden) agenda concerning a thorough naturalisation of the intellect.

An even more dramatic consequence concerned the sense of reality resulting from Averroes's metaphysics of the intellect. If a condition of fully unfolded intelligibility is the end towards which the whole universe strives, and if true intelligibility is intelligibility without an object (for, as already noticed, the highest level of actualisation is the coincidence of the thinking subject with both its thinking activity and the object of such activity), what is the role played by objects, imaginations and matter in this ontological setting? Can we still say that in Averroes's theory of knowledge there is an actual sense of reality, in its physical presence? This question may be answered in the affirmative after all. This is particularly evident every time Averroes criticises Plato's and Avicenna's positions. Intelligibles for Averroes are always abstracted from sensible experience, not emanated from a transcendent intellect. In this view, human beings can reach and share stable forms of understanding by assuming that they are able to apprehend and abstract imaginations of things. No wonder, then, that religious exegesis, poetics and rhetoric play such a fundamental role in Averroes's philosophy. The simplistic assumptions that are usually associated with the doctrine of the double truth (dissimulation, hypocrisy, and reading between the lines) hide in fact a much more sophisticated understanding of the complex exchanges that occur between forms of divine, natural and human communication. While medieval and Renaissance thinkers were perfectly aware of this complexity, the interpretative quandary became increasingly less subtle during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when the question of atheism gradually replaced that of exegesis.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to causing the severing of the natural link connecting natural appearances to their intelligible counterparts, the end of the era of the intellect – an era that spans from Greco-Roman philosophy to the Renaissance – also marked the end of ascending and descending streams of intelligible energy holding divine, cosmological and human meanings together. This became particularly evident in the fields of moral philosophy, cosmology and matter theory. In all these cases, the intellect represented the common denominator between the natural and moral activities of the universe, and Averroes's original contribution as a thinker was that of providing a systematic and cogent explanation of such a connection. It does not come as too much of a surprise, therefore, that early modern philosophers could still be fascinated by the Averroist notion of mental happiness. Averroes's philosophy provided a model of rationality based on the notion of moral fulfilment as intellectual consummation, the view of the universe as a self-sufficient system of hierarchically layered degrees of intelligible clarity and, finally, the concept of matter as an inherently and seamlessly extended substratum.

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<sup>53</sup>In this volume, James Montgomery provides an intriguing discussion of contemporary Straussian varieties of Averroistic inquiry. See *infra* 'Leo Strauss and the Alethiometer'.