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**A DIALOGUE BETWEEN ST, THOMAS AND IBN RUSHD  
ON THE PROBLEM OF «BEATITUDE»**

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In his *Long Commentary* on Aristotle's *De Anima*, Ibn Rushd apparently playing the role of a mere interpreter, on the problem of «beatitude» takes the position that, as St. Thomas puts it : man's ultimate happiness is deemed to be in this life, for the reason that he knows separate substances'.<sup>1</sup> This citation is made by St. Thomas from Ibn Rushd's *De Anima*, III, *Comm.* 36 (VI 175 ff.)

But, St. Thomas on the other hand, categorically denies the point of this interpretation and takes his own stand that «man's ultimate happiness does not consist in that knowledge of God whereby He is known by all or many in a vague kind of opinion... it is impossible for man's happiness to be in this life.»<sup>2</sup>

He disagrees with Ibn Rushd in : (a) that Aristotle has ever stated the point that the perfect happiness is to be obtained in this life; (b) that the perfect happiness is to understand the separate substances. As to the first statement St. Thomas argues :

But as Aristotle realized that man has no knowledge in this life other than that which he obtains through the speculative sciences, he maintained that man attains to a happiness which is not perfect but a human one<sup>3</sup>

1. Para. 2, Ch. XLI, B. 3, *Summa Contra Gentiles*

2. Para. 1, Ch. XLVIII, B. 3, S. C. G.

3. Para. 14, Ch. XLIII, B. 3, S. C. G.

And as to the second, he devoted the whole chapter XLIV to his claim that:

Man's ultimate happiness does not consist in the knowledge of separate substances imagined by the aforesaid opinions.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, St. Thomas believes that these opinions fall short of being an authentic commentary on Aristotle. Thus, he concludes:

Clearly, therefore, the opinion of Aristotle was that the ultimate happiness, which man is able to obtain in this life, is that knowledge of divine things which can be acquired through the speculative sciences. But that other way of knowing divine things, not through the speculative sciences, but by a kind of natural process of generation, was invented by some of his commentators.<sup>5</sup>

However, the main task that this paper has undertaken is to examine this claim of St. Thomas that Ibn Rushd's idea of «beatitudo» is his own invention and not an interpretation of Aristotelian doctrine of beatitudo as Ibn Rushd originally planned it to be.

In dealing with this investigation one should feel obliged to refer directly to the very original work of Ibn Rushd in his own language to find out what his commentary on the problem really is. This is because, there is a strong possibility that translations to which St. Thomas refers have, at least in this connection, failed to represent the whole idea of Ibn Rushd. This failure is, I suppose, mostly due to different technicalities which have, since the early Medieval philosophy, created a wide gap between Islamic way of thinking and the Western philosophical schools.

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4. Ch. XLIV, B. 3, S. C. G.

5. Para. 5, Ch. XLIV, B. 3, S. C. G.



But while the *Long Commentary* of Ibn Rushd is for the most part extant in Arabic, the *Long De Anima* to which St. Thomas's criticisms of Ibn Rushd's views on beatitude are directed is unfortunately not extant in its original form. That is, there is no access to this part of the Arabic text of the *Long Commentary* to be taken over in our study. The Hebrew and the Latin versions which are available do not satisfy the purpose of this paper as already stated.

Of this missing part Professor H. A. Wolfson says :

Among those lost in the Arabic are some of the most important works, such as the *Long Posterior Analytics*, the *Middle* and the *Long physics*, the *Long De Anima* and the *Middle Metaphysics*.

For this reason, however, I should have no choice but to substitute the *Middle Commentary of De Anima* for the *Long Commentary* of which the whole book of *De Anima* is missing. Occasionally I feel free to refer to the *Long Metaphysics*, if necessary.

Here then I present my own translation of Ibn Rushd's idea of beatitude from his Arabic *Middle Commentary, Book De Anima*.

We say that this group of philosophers (Aristotle and his disciples) in consideration of this problem. i. e. beatitude, hinge upon the point that when the speculative intellect by its nature is to grasp forms from the objects, while its function in this connection is to derive these forms from non - separate objects, then the same speculative intellect should be *a fortiori* able to draw those separate forms from separate substances as well. By separate forms I mean those nonmaterial intelligible forms as they are understood by the speculative intellect, and in fact are separate from matter. This

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6. 'Publication of the Corpus of Averroes' *Speculum*, p. 421, 1931.

means that the «intellect in potency»<sup>7</sup> by receiving these intelligible forms transcends itself to the status of «the actual intellect». Thus in transcending from the state of potency to the status of the actual intellect, the «intellect in potency» has reached its final destination which is considered to be its own absolute perfection. But on the other hand, if «the intellect in potency» has not obtained its own final status, that is, if it has not undertaken the transformation or transubstantiation from the stage of potency to the spiritual rank of the actual intellect, it remains in its original state as the generated intellect. It is obvious then that a generated being qua-generated being acts as defective and is imperfect. However, if this has been understood, we then say that such a transition from the state of potency to the reign of the actual intellect is the final perfection of the nature of man as man, and it is this finality that should be regarded as man's ultimate destination and beatitude.<sup>8</sup>

Taking this passage as the main statement of Ibn Rushd on the problem of beatitude, we must observe that there are some radical points to be explicated. (a) That «the intellect in potency» is a material and generated being, therefore, it is subject to the natural law of generation and corruption. (b) That the transition from the state of potency to the status of the «actual intellect» is by way of transformation, that is, by obtaining the intelligible

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7- «The intellect in potency» is that Aristotlean notion which has been translated by western scholars to «the possible intellect». We shall discuss why Muslim philosophers do not accept this translation.

8. *The Middle Commentary, De Anima* P. 87, Dāirat al m'aārif al-Othumānyah, Heidar - Ābād Dakan, 1947.



forms which are separate from material objects. (c) That the achievement of such a transformation is the ultimate and perfect object of the human nature. (d) That as long as «the intellect in potency» remains in its primitive stage, that is, in a sheer potency, its actions are deemed to be defective, and the intellect itself is frustrated in its attempt to meet the final beatitude. (e) That this doctrine is the opinion of Aristotle and his disciples including Ibn Rushd himself.

As for the last point, despite the *Long Commentary* in which Ibn Rushd offers his comment step by step right after his quotation of the translated Aristotelian text, *the Middle* and *the Minor Commentaries* do not take such a procedure, but rather, Ibn Rushd in these two works, almost constantly attributes his final judgements to Aristotle. As we have precisely seen in the above passage, he put the whole responsibility of this doctrine on Aristotle and his disciples.

But St. Thomas believes that Aristotle has never stated such a doctrine which holds that the ultimate happiness consists in a union of human intellect with the separate forms through the unification act of the agent intellect. He says :

It is clear that Aristotle, whose opinion the philosophers in question endeavored to follow, did not hold that man's ultimate happiness consists in a union of this kind. For he proves that man's happiness is an operation of his own according to perfect virtue<sup>9</sup>.

Besides, St. Thomas puts forward the account on which his disagreement with Ibn Rushd's hermeneutical doctrine is based. This is as follows :

First, we have shown above that the possible intellect is not a substance separate from us in being. Hence it does not follow

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9- Para. 5. Ch. XLIV. Book III, S. C. G.

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that it is the subject of separate substances; especially since Aristotle asserts that the possible intellect is the power of becoming all things so that seemingly it is the subject of such things only «as are made» to be understood.<sup>10</sup>

Before we go deeply into a comparative study of Ibn Rushd and St. Thomas on the problem of «beatitude», we must observe the vast disparity between Islamic philosophical version of Aristotelian technical terms and the Western scholastic conventions for these terms. One of these cases is drastically displayed in the problem of «beatitude» when arguments of both sides centre upon the notion of «the possible intellect». While the origin of this notion is typically Aristotelian, the Arabic version of it, as we have seen in Ibn Rushd's statement, is «the intellect in potency» and the Western translation is «the possible intellect». Aristotle speaks of this concept in various places, so does Ibn Rushd, and for that matter, St. Thomas. But each of them used it in a different expression, such that it could easily lead to a great deal of confusion.

Putting insistently the primitive stage of the human intellect in the expression «the intellect in potency», Ibn Rushd, as I understand, tried to convey the whole significance of the original term which St. Thomas believes that Aristotle is trying to assert. That is, the assertion that the possible intellect is the power of 'becoming all things'. This is because the power of 'becoming all things' is the only intrinsic characteristic of 'potency', and not that of 'possibility'. Therefore Ibn Rushd means by 'the intellect in potency' the power of becoming all intelligible forms.

Now, we can see why Averroes, like Avicenna and al - Farabi, never appeals to this kind of intellect in terms of «possible intellect». He is quite conscious not to use the logical modality of «possibility» versus «necessity»

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10. Para 5. Ch. XL III, Book III, S. C. G.



in this regard. Instead, he uses another Aristotelian term i. e. «potency» to explain clearly his idea about the primitive intellect so as to avoid any confusion between the power of becoming and the modal logic of proposition, or the mood for contingent beings. *i.e. Possibility*. These aforesaid philosophers, also, deny to even give the title «potential intellect» to this stage of human intellect, because they are afraid of getting involved in the problem of quality and the relation between substance and accident. Besides, it is observed that Aristotelian «potency» need not mean anything but a sheer passive element for a material form. Thus given, potency has been understood as absolutely devoid of forms. Although such an element which has been defined as absolutely devoid of forms can never actually exist as such, it is nevertheless understood as a constituent element of a material being. For all these reasons these philosophers prefer to call this intellect «the intellect in potency», and not «possible intellect».

*The possible intellect as a separate substance .*

We just read in the above statement that St. Thomas criticized Averroes in these words: «that the possible intellect is not a substance separate from us in being». Now, we want to understand if Ibn Rushd has ever stated such a thesis, and what he actually means by separation if he eventually speaks of a separate substance.

Using the analogy of «potency», Ibn Rushd, as I understand, wants to say that man's intellectual power in the beginning is devoid of , but «prepared» for, the prospective intelligible forms. This idea is also taken from Aristotle when he says that the human intellect in the beginning is as a blank tablet on which nothing is written.

On the account of this analogy, Ibn Rushd has extended his interpretation of the Aristotelian idea of the final achievement of human intellect, and asserted that the human intellect becomes an actual perfect intellect when it has been united with «separate forms».

Dealing with the intrinsic characteristics of «potency», Ibn Rushd quite precisely stresses the notion of the power of «becoming» or transcending one's primitive stage to the final perfection. From this very point we shall understand that he, despite St. Thomas' accusation, is not prepared to say that «the possible intellect» is a substance separate from us. Because, it seems to be quite incompatible with his analogy of potency to say that it is a substance separate from us. How can a potency, which does not subsist except in forms, be independent of and separate from us in being? But, since «the intellect in potency», in Ibn Rushd's words, is the power of becoming or the power of transformation from the primitive stage to its own separate intelligible form, it then becomes separate from matter when it has achieved this transformation by being transcended into the rank of the actual intellect. Here we notice that there is again another point of difference between the original text of Ibn Rushd's commentary and St. Thomas' citation of that commentary. This is the problem of «separation». It seems, most probably, that whatever Ibn Rushd has meant by the possible intellect to become separate at times we understand separate substances, is that the intellect in the case of this achievement becomes separate from the previous matter, that is, from the potency in which it primarily involved, not from us as human beings. There is much difference between separation from the body as matter, and separation from us as human beings. The former is the problem of the immateriality or supernaturalistic being of human soul, while the latter is the question of separate substances that are not united with each other in being, no matter in what kind of being they may be involved, natural or metaphysical. That is all we need to say for the time being, of the different terminology in Ibn Rushd's philosophy.

*Incorruptibility of the possible intellect*

Now, we turn to our consideration of the «incorruptibility» of the pos -



sible intellect which St. Thomas remarks as the basis for Averroes' s deviation from Aristotle's opinion. He says:

As the greatest difficulty presented by Alexander' s opinion was that he supposed that «habitual intellect» to be altogether corruptible, Averroes thought , to offer an easier proof that at times we understand separate substances, in that *he deemed the possible intellect to be incorruptible and substantially separate from us, just as the agent intellect*.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this attribution, we have seen that Ibn Rushd clearly expressed his idea about the nature of the possible intellect, or in his words «the intellect in potency» by saying that «if the intellect in potency» has not undertaken the operation of transformatiation, or transubstantiation, from the primitive state of potency to the transcendental rank of the actual intellect , it remains in its original state of generation and corruption. This was what he said in the *Middle De Anima*. Concerning the same subject he maintains his position in the *Long Metaphysics* by this statement :

We have already observed this problem at length in the Book of *De Anima*. In that book we have pointed out that the agent intellect is considered to be like a form for the intellect in potency so much so that it is that intellect as the form which both acts in us by providing intelligible forms and receives these forms when provided. But its power of receptivity of the forms is understandable only from the stand point of being still in the state of potency. We also have stated that «*the intellect in potency*» is subject to generation and corruption, because as thus considered, it is a generated and corruptible being . Finally we have remarked that this view is the opinion of

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11. Para. 1, Ch. XLIII, Book III, S. C. G. .

the philosopher i. e. Aristotle. <sup>12</sup>

I think a little reflection on these two passages of Ibn Rushd is needed to understand that the commentator does not want to say anything more than whatever admittedly Aristotle has stated, For, Ibn Rushd in the first place does not want to say that the possible intellect as being in the state of potency is incorruptible and separate from us in being as it seemed to be understood by St. Thomas. But the point is that Ibn Rushd in fact tries to defend his hermeneutical idea of the «intellect in potency» as the power of *becoming* an actual and separate intellect. This is also another point which has been admittedly made by Aristotle that the so called possible intellect is the power of becoming every thing. He says thus :

There is that intellect, which is such as being able to become everything. <sup>13</sup>

On account of this typical Aristotelian textual statement, Ibn Rushd points out that when intellect has reached its final perfection by virtue of becoming an actual intellect, it is no longer in potency, and as thus, is incorruptible and separate, not separate from us, but from its own primitive state of potency and potentiality. Whether, in this case, the intellect as being actual and in its final status is part of our nature belonging to our immaterial soul or is separate from us in being, Ibn Rushd never places himself in the position to offer us any comment. Therefore to suggest the separation as separation from us in being is to venture a position wide of Ibn Rushd's point in this connection.

The second point of Thomistic argument against Ibn Rnshd is this :

Again, it has also been proved above that the agent intellect is not a separate substance, but part of the soul, to which Aristotle assigns the operation of «making things to be actually under -

<sup>12</sup> .Para. d. p . 1489 *Tafsir MĀBA D at-Tabieat*, Volume 3, edited by Maurice Bouyges IMPRIMERIE CATHOLIQUE, MCMXLVIII.

<sup>13</sup>. Aristotle, *De Anima*, B. III, Ch. 5 (430 414 ).



stood», which lies in our power. Hence it does not follow that understanding by means of the agent intellect is the cause of our being able to understand separate substances, or else we would always understand them.<sup>14</sup>

Here we see that St. Thomas puts forward one of the most controversial problems in philosophy; the problem of the ontological status of the agent intellect both in truth and in Ibn Rushd's philosophy. In deciding the problem on his own principle and accusing Averroes on account of that decision as an inventor and not interpreter, St. Thomas appears to be begging the question.

Speaking of «the agent intellect» or in Arabic technical words «al-'aql al-fa'al» which is to be translated as «the active intellect», there is a great deal of discussion to be held. The most relevant aspect which probably helps us understand the controversy between Ibn Rushd and St. Thomas, is the problem of different interpretations of this Aristotelian notion made by the two different cultures: The classical Medieval Islamic thought and the Western systems of philosophy. While in Islamic philosophy there is a radical consensus among all philosophical circles since its early history down to the present time about the ontological status of «the agent intellect», in the Western systems, on the other hand, it is by no means generally agreed upon what the nature of «the agent intellect» would be like, whether in truth or in Aristotle's thesis of intellect.

Beyond any question, however, Aristotle does speak of a type of intellect which is characterized by acting upon every thing and is a thing both essentially «in act», and separate. But what are the senses in which it has to be taken is the kernel of one of the most long standing disputes in the history of philosophy in the West. On the contrary, in Islamic thought it is clear

14. Para. 6, Ch. XLIII, B. III, S. C. G.

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enough that there are, in the early history of philosophy two major hermeneutical Greek systems concerning the problem of creation and the reality of the world. One is Plato's theory of «the forms», and the other is Aristotle's notion of «the agent intellect» and its relation to the material world and the prime matter i. e. potency in general and to the human potential intellect in particular.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980 - 1037) and his successor Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126 - 98) both hold a similar view on the point that the agent intellect is both absolutely separate from material involvements and from us as far as our being is a material phenomenon. On the basis of this view there is always a strong tendency among this group of philosophers to make an academic reconciliation between Plato's theory of «forms» and Aristotle's notion of «intellects», as thus scholarly attempted by al-Farabi in his famous work; *A Cross Philosophical Study of Plato and Aristotle*.

Turning to the initial stage of the notion of «the agent intellect», we will see that Aristotle stresses a separated or separable intellect. He says:

And this intellect separable, uncompounded and incapable of being acted on, a thing essentially in act. For the agent is always more excellent than the recipient, and the principle than its material. Only separated, however, is it what it real is. And this alone is immortal and perpetual. It does not remember, because it is impassible; the passive intellect is corruptible, and the soul understands nothing apart from this latter.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from any thing else, the fact that Aristotle does use the word «separated» or «separable» along with other ontological characteristics of «the agent intellect» gives Ibn Rushd a textual evidence to account for his interpretation among others as being not, at least, undocumented and not, as

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15. *De Anima*, B. III, Ch. 5 (430 a 10 - 430 a 25).



St. Thomas supposes, invented by Ibn Rushd himself. I do not say that Ibn - **Rushd's** interpretation concerning «the agent intellect» is the best or even closer to the factual evidences of the text than the others including St. Thomas himself. What I am inclined to say is that Ibn Rushd, being historically described as oriented by his predecessors such as al - Farabi and Avicenna , has the right to believe that his understanding of Aristotle is not after all so wide apart from the textual evidence that can be marked as invention instead of interpretation. Because in the Islamic philosophical terminology the word «separate» (al - mufāriq) always means the separation from matter, it therefore means an independent entity which need not exist in a matter. Accordingly these philosophers have two kinds of separate entities. One is a semi-separate entity, and the other is pure and absolute separate one which has not any degree of reliance upon matter or material objects in its existence, though it acts upon all bodily beings as a whole. Corresponding to this dualistic term of separation they have another technique to convey more accurately the Aristotelian notion of the separate intellect. This is what in English should be read «purity» or «abstraction», ( al - tajrid ). Avicenna has devoted a complete chapter of his famous book «*Al - Ishārāt*» to the state of the ontological separation of «the agent intellect» under the title of «purity». These philosophers including Ibn Rushd have the world of *pure reality* which is divine separate world, and the world in which reality is mixed up with matter which is responsible source for change, instability, generation and corruption.

In this system of philosophy, while both, the human actual intellect and the divine agent intellect, are being held as separate substances, the former is treated as a semiseparate substance and the latter as the absolute separate one, corresponding to the real «forms» of Plato.

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Avicenna describes these two different kinds of «separation» or «purity», concerning the relation between the human actual intellect and the agent intellect, with which Ibn Rushd hardly seems to be in disagreement. He says:

If the rational part of the human soul obtains habitually the status of union with the agent intellect, and becomes actual intellect, it will never cause itself any damage or pain of the loss of its intellectual implements, because in this state of existence the human intellect is self - understanding, that is to say, no implements and procedures of understanding are needed due to its union with the agent intellect.<sup>16</sup>

Ibn Rushd takes almost the same position when he, in *The Middle De-Anima*, reflects on Aristotle's statement about «the agent intellect» by saying:

From preceding discussions it becomes clear that in those intelligible principles understood by the human intellect there is always an element of- potency and another element of immateriality and separation ... But that intellect which in its acts has no need to a potency at all is to be understood as absolutely separate from matter ...

From this stand - point we understand that «the agent intellect» is nobler than «the intellect in potency». The agent intellect exists in itself, and is by its very existence a perpetual actual intellect. We have already understood that this intellect is a form, and now here it becomes apparent that such a pure form is the agent intellect. For this reason it is possible to think that this intellect can be ultimately understood by us. If it actually happens, then we have with all certainty arrived at the eternal intelligible world.

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16. *Kitab al - Ishārāt wa - l - Tanbihāt*, Ch. 7 ,Para. 3 .



It is eternal because it is in itself intellect and intelligible whether we understand it or not. It is not an intellect or an intelligible being because we make it intelligible by our «intellect in potency» such as the case in those potential intelligibles that we actually make them understood.<sup>17</sup>

Through all this, we can get these textual theses: (a) That the «agent intellect», in the opinion of these philosophers, is an absolutely separate substance which human speculative intellect can ultimately communicate with through a kind of intellectual union. (b) That the possible intellect, or in their words, the «intellect in potency» is also a separate substance but not absolutely separate in terms of the separation of the agent intellect, and not separate from us in being. It is rather separate from its own potentiality if and only if it becomes united with the agent intellect through reaching the stage of the actual intellect, it is therefore a semi - separate substance in the sense that only to that extent which it becomes actual, it is not therefore potential and no longer is to be called «the intellect in potency», (c) That this intellectual unity or conjunction which counts for the ultimate human beatitude is «contingent» and never essential, and for that matter it does not count for a necessary knowledge which is ontologically inherent in the human nature. Rather, it should be understood in terms of «contingency» analogous to a perceptual knowledge that happens to us by means of our natural implements of understanding when we eventually perceive colors through the light of the sun. Just as we can perceive color, through the light of the sun, so can we, not must we, understand those separate intelligible things through the action of the agent intellect.

Having understood Ibn Rushd's «beatitude» in this way, let us try to

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17. *The Middle De Anima*, P. 86, Dā irat al - Mā ārifol - Othmāniya Hydar Ābād Dakan, India, 1947 .

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reCAPITULATE St. Thomas' reaction to it on the basis of his idea of the ontological status of the possible intellect and that of the agent intellect.

As to the first objection that we have already quoted, I do not think that Ibn Rushd's theory of the possible intellect, or in his own words, «the intellect in potency,» has been correctly presented in the framework of St. Thomas' criticism. That is because we have seen in various places, in the *De Anima* as well as in the *Metaphysics*, that Ibn Rushd strongly and precisely denied what St. Thomas tried to bring as a charge against him, since Ibn Rushd in principle disagreed with the idea that the intellect in potency is ever incorruptible and separable. In this connection he exactly has taken the opposite position of what St. Thomas tried to attribute to him, and proved that the intellect in potency is a generated being, and thus understood, is subject to the generation and corruption. This is, of course, the ontological description of the so-called intellect in potency before this intellect reaches its own final destination which is the union with the agent intellect. But after attaining to this ultimate felicity this intellect becomes separate, but this separation still is not absolute in terms of a divine separate substance, it is not therefore a separation from us in being in any sense, but just from its own previous state of potentiality and from the mediation of its own implements of knowing. In other words, in attaining to the rank of the actual intellect, the intellect in potency becomes self-understanding and independent of its faculties of knowing.

Strange enough, while we see St. Thomas condemning Ibn Rushd in that: «he deemed the possible intellect to be incorruptible and substantially separate from us in being.» we, on the other hand, find Ibn Rushd in the *Middle-De Anima* sharply bring the same charge against other commentators of Aristotle. He says :



For the involvement of this great difficulty, the commentators tried to introduce «the intellect in potency» as an eternal separate substance belonging to the world of pure intellects, that is to say, a kind of intellect whose existence is designed to be in potentiality towards the separate intelligibles, so as to resemble, in its relations to these separate intelligibles, the relation of potency to forms. But this is not correct, because to the perfect existence of this kind of separate being nothing of generated and corruptible beings, like our beings, can attain.<sup>18</sup>

In this passage Ibn Rushd categorically denies the possible intellect to be incorruptible and separate. But I do not know what textual justification was for St. Thomas to attribute such a statement to Ibn Rushd's opinion.

To conclude our discussion on the first and the main point of the Thomistic argument, I must, in all sincerity, say that my investigation of the problem in the course of this comparative study can not so far set up a desirable technical communication between St. Thomas and Averroes on their treatise upon «the possible intellect».

On the basis of the unavailability of this version of the possible intellect, St. Thomas offered another argument with Ibn Rushd concerning the analogy of light and color in the perceptual knowledge. His argument reads thus :

Now we can not ascribe to a stone, in which there is color, either the action of seeing, so that it see, or the action of the sun, so that it give light. Therefore, according to this opinion, we can not ascribe to man either the action of the possible intellect, so that he understand, or the action of the agent intellect, so that he

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18- *The Middle De Anima* p. 85 Dairet al - Ma'arif, Hydar Abad, Dakan India, 1987 .

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understand separate substances, or that he make things to be actually understood. <sup>19</sup>

Here again St. Thomas has taken for granted that Ibn Rushd really deemed the possible intellect to be separate from us in being, just as the agent intellect is. Having presupposed this as the principle, St. Thomas seems to be quite right in his argument that one can never ascribe the action of one separate entity to the others. On this account it is true that one can not attribute to man either the action of the possible intellect, or the action of the agent intellect, if one supposedly believes that these three substances i. e. the agent intellect, the possible intellect and man, are apart from one another in being. In this case the analogy also is complete, because as far as there are three different things in the perceptual knowledge ranging from a stone to the sight and the light, there are also, in the intellectual knowledge, three separate entities i. e. man, the possible intellect, and the agent intellect, these altogether count for the human intellectual knowledge, but such a knowledge can not be ascribed to man so that he understand separate substances, or that he make things to be actually understood. Thus, assuming that the possible intellect is separate from us, just as the agent intellect is, the point of this argument is very clear, and consequently Ibn Rushd can not say it is man who understands separate substances.

But, to my understanding, this argument also is based on and derived from the previous misrepresentation of Ibn Rushd's idea of the possible intellect. If it has been understood that Ibn Rushd does not want to prove the separation of the possible intellect, and that the possible intellect is not in his opinion, something beside the human nature, I can not think how St. Thomas brings this charge against Ibn Rushd, and how this analogy works against Ibn Rushd's doctrine of beatitude.

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19- B. 3, Ch. XLIII, Para. 6. S. C. G.



Besides, the analogy of light and colors was originated by Aristotle himself and expanded by each of his commentators to be used for or against each other's argument. In the *De Anima* Aristotle says :

...and there is that which acts upon everything, as a sort of state, like light, for light too, in a way, makes potential colors actual.<sup>20</sup>

As the analogy in its original form purports, there is no clear correspondence in every respect between the perceptual knowledge and the intellectual one. All we can understand is to hold a kind of similarity between the action of the agent intellect on the one hand and the action of the sun on the other so that both of them are making potential things actual. That is, just as the light of the sun makes potential colors actual, so also the action of the agent intellect makes things to be actually understood. The analogy in itself does not require three separate entities on either side of itself. If it does, as thus understood by its Thomistic expanded form, it stands as an argument against St. Thomas himself, not against Ibn Rushd. That is because it means that Aristotle by offering such an analogy asks for three separate substances in the intellectual knowledge corresponding to the three separate physical objects in the perceptual knowledge. So, in this case Aristotle is the one who must be to blame for saying, by this analogy, that the possible intellect is separate from us in being, and accordingly Ibn Rushd, on the assumption of this analogy, is right in deeming the possible intellect to be separate from us in being as far as this textual evidence with its Thomistic expanded form is concerned.

So much for the notion of *Commentary* and that of separation of the possible intellect in Ibn Rushd's philosophy. Speaking of the theory of «union» and what is meant by such a term with regard to the relation of man with

20- Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book III, Ch. V, 430 a 10 - 43 a 25 .

the possible intellect and with regard to his relation with the agent intellect, there is much to be said from the stand - point of Islamic philosophy in general and of Ibn Rushd's *Commentary* in particular. It is in fact another subject to be taken under consideration in an independent essay. The main questions on this topic are: How can we understand the unity of man as a material being with the possible intellect as a supposedly separate substance in terms of an ontological unification, if the unity is really ontological? Does not this unity take another form concerning the relation of man with the agent intellect ?.

Professor Pegis in his article observed the second question by distinguishing two different aspects to the doctrine of «continuatio» in Averroes . He remarks :

- (1) There is the *continuatio* or union of man, with the possible intellect which is intended to explain his abstract knowledge of material things.
- (2) There is *continuatio* with the agent intellect which is intended to explain how, by thus uniting himself to an intellect that knows separate substances, man comes to possess the same beatifying knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

These two aspects of the doctrine of union are being articulated both by Avicenna and by Averroes in their works of metaphysics. This explanation is purely ontological based on the widespread ramifications of the notion of «existence» while the notion itself remains in its absolute simplicity. But this ontological unity is intended to mark specific relation between man and the possible intellect not between man and the agent intellect, nor, *a fortiori*, between the possible intellect and the agent intellect. In regard to the agent intellect and its relation to us, there is a strong tendency among these philosophers to introduce a kind of *epistemic* union which is assigned to resolve

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21. A. C. Pegis, p. 3, footnote, *Thomas and Nicomachian Ethics, Mediaeval Studies*, vol. 25, p. 3, 1963 .



the other problems concerned. But this paper is not prepared to bring forward a presentation of this problem.

Now we can reach the conclusion that both of these two major Thomistic arguments are raised from the same source of misinterpretation, that is, from the misinterpreted notion of «the possible intellect». It has been assumed by St. Thomas that Ibn Rushd deemed that notion to be incorruptible and substantially separate from us. Had not such a grave misinterpretation arisen via those responsible translators, I would feel quite confident that this wide difference of opinions on the problem of «beatitude» would never have arisen between these two great historical figures of philosophy 'both of whom are representing the same type of thought but in two different cultures.

\* - Le lecteur voudra bien excuser la mauvaise qualité de la typographie et est prié d'ajouter les points manquants aux lettres g = غ, d = ض, z = ظ, t = ط, h = ح, s = ص .