

THE INTELLIGIBLE IN ACT AND THE UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AVERROES AND AQUINAS

*O INTELIGÍVEL EM AÇÃO E A UNIDADE DO
CONHECIMENTO: UM ESTUDO COMPARATIVO DE
AVERRÓIS E TOMÁS DE AQUINO*

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Abstract

This article reconsiders the disagreement between Averroes and Thomas Aquinas from a somewhat narrower angle than the one usually emphasized in debates on the unity of the intellect. Rather than asking once again, in general terms, whether intellect is one or many, it problematizes the question of the subject or ground in which the intelligible in act is found. When Averroes' Long Commentary on the De Anima and Aquinas' De Unitate Intellectus are read together around this question, it becomes clear that the disagreement does not arise merely from two rival descriptions of the same cognitive process. More fundamentally, it arises from two different con-

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ceptions of universality. Averroes ties the universality of science to the unity of the Material Intellect, whereas Aquinas maintains that one and the same intelligible can exist immaterially in many distinct intellects without losing its universality. By tracing their approaches to the imaginative power, abstraction, and the relation between intellect and person, the article argues that Aquinas's critique is indeed powerful, but that its force operates above all within a Thomistic metaphysical horizon.

Keywords: Averroes; Thomas Aquinas; Unity of the Intellect; Material Intellect; Agent Intellect; Intelligible in Act; Aristotelian Psychology; Medieval Epistemology; Metaphysics of Knowledge; Universality of Science; Cogitative Power; Hylo-morphism; Intersubjectivity; Personal Agency; Transpersonal Cognition.

Resumo

Este artigo examina o desacordo epistemológico e metafísico entre Averróis e Tomás

de Aquino, com especial atenção ao status ontológico do intelecto e do inteligível em ato. Baseando-se principalmente no Longo Comentário de Averróis sobre o De Anima e no De Unitate Intellectus de Tomás de Aquino, o artigo defende que o ponto decisivo de separação entre os dois pensadores não é uma falha no raciocínio, mas a adoção de diferentes pressupostos metafísicos. Enquanto Averróis defende a unidade do Intelecto Material como condição necessária para a universalidade do conhecimento científico, Tomás de Aquino defende intelectos individualizados e sustenta que os inteligíveis em ato podem existir em uma pluralidade de mentes humanas. Ao acompanhar as funções conceituais do poder cogitativo, da abstração e da individuação intelectual, o artigo reavalia a força da crítica de Tomás de Aquino e considera a coerência da doutrina de Averróis dentro do quadro mais amplo da psicologia aristotélica.

Palavras-chave: Averróis; Tomás de Aquino; Unidade do Intelecto; Intelecto Material; Intelecto Agente; Inteligível em Ato; Psicologia Aristotélica; Epistemologia Medieval; Metafísica do Conhecimento; Universalidade da Ciência; Poder Cogitativo; Hilomorfismo; Intersubjetividade; Agência Pessoal; Cognição Transpessoal.

Introduction

Few medieval controversies have remained as philosophically durable as the dispute between Averroes and Thomas Aquinas over intellect and the possibility of universal knowledge. In much of the secondary literature, this controversy has been framed under the familiar question of whether intellect is one or many. That formulation is certainly important, yet it risks obscuring the more precise metaphysical issue that gives the debate its force. The deeper problem is not simply numerical. It concerns the ontological locus of the intelligible in act: in what subject, or on what ground, is the intelligible to be said to exist? Once the problem is stated in these terms, the controversy appears less as a standard opposition between monopsychism and personalism than as a confrontation between rival accounts of universality, cognition, and the relation between thought and the human subject.

This article argues that Averroes and Aquinas are not merely offering two different descriptions of the same cognitive process. Rather, they begin from different assumptions about what universality requires if science is to remain genuinely universal. Averroes ties the universality of science to the unity of the Material Intellect, because only a common and non-particular intellect can preserve the intelligible as universal. Aquinas, by contrast, maintains that one and the same intelligible species may exist immaterially in many individual intellects without thereby losing its universality, and he does so in order to preserve the human being as the true subject of understanding, willing, and judgment. The disagreement, therefore, is metaphysical before it becomes polemical. Methodologically, the article proceeds through a comparative reading of Averroes's *Long Commentary on the De Anima* and Aquinas's *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas*, with particular attention to the themes of cogitation, abstraction, and the ontological status of intelligibles in act. The aim is not to determine which thinker "wins" in any simple sense, but to clarify the distinct philosophical goods each position seeks to preserve. On this basis, the article contends that Aquinas's critique is indeed powerful, yet decisive above all within a Thomistic metaphysical horizon. Read from within Averroes's own framework, the dispute appears less as a straightforward refutation than as an encounter between two internally coherent but incompatible conceptions of knowledge. In that respect, the controversy remains significant not only for medieval philosophy, but also for broader debates concerning universality, intersubjectivity, and personal agency.

Literature Review

Scholarship on the Averroes–Aquinas controversy may be grouped into three broad lines of inquiry. The first places the debate within the longer history of the transmission and transformation of Aristotelian psychology. Studies such as Dimitri Gutas’s work on the Graeco-Arabic translation movement and Dag Nikolaus Hasse’s study of the later European reception of Arabic philosophy demonstrate that the problem of intellect cannot be understood apart from the historical movement of Aristotle’s texts across linguistic, theological, and philosophical settings. Herbert A. Davidson’s major study of al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes is especially important in this regard, since it situates Averroes’s account of intellect within the larger Islamic philosophical tradition rather than treating it as an isolated medieval anomaly. Together, these studies establish the historical and conceptual background of the debate, though they do not usually make the ontological status of the intelligible in act the central analytic problem.

A second line of scholarship focuses more directly on Averroes’s own psychology and epistemology. Richard C. Taylor’s analysis remains central because it reconstructs with particular clarity the relation between the Agent Intellect, the Material Intellect, and the universality of science, while also showing that Aquinas’s critique gains its force from premises Averroes himself would not grant. More recent work, including Mehmet Duman’s study of the material intellect in the *Long Commentary*, has further clarified the role of the Material Intellect as the locus of intelligibles in act. Deborah Black’s influential article adds another dimension by showing that Aquinas’s objections often presuppose a model of epistemic ownership foreign to Averroes’s framework. In her reading, the crucial issue is not simply whether the human being “understands,” but what counts as the proper bearer of the act of understanding. This body of scholarship is indispensable for reading Averroes on his own terms, particularly against reductive portrayals of his position as a denial of human cognition.

A third line of research concerns Aquinas’s response and the comparative structure of the dispute. Bernardo Carlos Bazan’s classic article on *intellectum speculativum* is especially important because it argues that Aquinas reads Averroes through a Thomistic conceptual lens, particularly by assimilating Averroes’s account to the logic of *species intelligibilis*. On the Thomistic side, studies by Lawrence Dewan, Robert Pasnau, and Therese Scarpelli Cory help clarify why Aquinas insists on the immanence of understanding within the individual rational soul and why this insistence is tied not only to epistemology but also to anthropology, self-knowledge,

and theological personhood. What emerges from this literature is that Aquinas's critique cannot be reduced to a merely technical disagreement about abstraction. It belongs to a broader metaphysical and theological vision in which the unity of the human subject is philosophically and doctrinally indispensable.

Yet for all their value, these studies also leave a space for the present article. Much of the literature has treated the controversy under headings such as monopsychism, the unity of the intellect, self-knowledge, or the status of the rational soul. Fewer studies have made the ontological location of the intelligible in act the explicit organizing question of the comparison. The contribution of the present article lies precisely here. Rather than asking in general whether intellect is one or many, it asks where the intelligible in act is said to exist, and how different answers to that question produce rival accounts of universality, personal agency, and the possibility of science. In this way, the article aims not merely to repeat the standard Averroes–Aquinas opposition, but to redescribe the dispute at the level of the metaphysical presuppositions that make that opposition possible in the first place.

1. The Aristotelian Background

A comparison of the Western and Eastern intellectual terrains through Averroes and Aquinas at the same time brings into view a classical philosophical dispute. In this context, the enduring question and problem around which the two thinkers differ also reveals the critique of scholastic inheritance and its internal tensions. At the center of this problem lies the question of how what is universal can be known by individual subjects. Put differently, the issue concerns the very possibility of such knowledge. Averroes, in summary fashion, tends to preserve the universality of truth without reducing universals to the mind of each individual subject. Aquinas, by contrast, directs his objection precisely at this point. For him, Averroes' approach involves a fundamental neglect of the individual's being himself in acts of understanding, willing, judging, and acting in accordance with volition.

The works of Aristotle, often regarded as the culmination of classical Greek philosophy, did not pass directly into the Latin world. They were introduced there above all through philosophers working in Islamic philosophy. Among the figures who stand out most prominently at this point is Averroes. It would seem that the main reason for his prominence lies in the fact that he did not merely comment on Aristotle's texts in a simple way, but also advanced his own theories on central issues. It is well known that he introduced Aristotle's *De Anima* to the Latin world. Particularly important is the theory of cognition he constructed by treating the Agent

Intellect and the Corporeal or Material Intellect as separate substances. As far as one can tell, this approach is the principal source of the disagreement that later emerges with Aquinas. In this approach, intellect assumes a universal role that cannot be contained within the limits of the individual subject's own mind whenever truth is at issue. In other words, the thinking human being is, on this account, elevated to a common and incorporeal level of understanding. This would seem to be precisely the point at which Aquinas's objection takes shape. Aquinas, who argues that every subject or individual must possess a unique mode of understanding, believes this is vital for the individual; otherwise, the individual remains in a passive state as a thinking being, and understanding—that is, cognition—becomes something that arises within them and reduces them to a mere instrument. Thus, the disagreement between the two thinkers moves beyond a merely psychic dispute and comes to rest on the ground of the subject's agency. For this reason, our inquiry exceeds the limits of a disagreement merely about "one soul and individuality." What is at stake here is the ontological status of the reality of intellectum in actu. This, in turn, shows that the two thinkers are not simply offering different conclusions about the same issue, but are approaching imagination, subjectivation, and the very nature of truth and science through different possibilities. Aquinas opposes Averroes not so much by "disclosing an internal contradiction" in him as by confronting him from within another metaphysical conception of what universality requires."

2. The Interpretive Openness of the Distinction between the Agent Intellect and the Possible/Material Intellect

In the Long Commentary, Averroes develops an Aristotelian approach on the basis of Islamic philosophy. Put differently, he proceeds from an Aristotelian conception of soul, yet does so while following the broader tradition of Islamic philosophy. Starting from the distinction between the Agent Intellect and the Corporeal or Material Intellect, he undertakes, in a certain sense, a reconstruction. These are not powers inhering in the individual souls of human beings; rather, they are separate intellectual faculties. It is precisely this move that reveals the singularity of his theory. For him, the true agent or subject of universal knowledge cannot be a transient faculty. If truth or science takes universals precisely as universals for its object, then all intelligible forms must exist in a single common Corporeal Intellect shared by all subjects, that is, by all human beings (Altuner, 2017, pp. 5–17; Taylor, 1999, p.

149).

As is well known, Aristotle states that when it comes to knowledge, the senses are the first step—or, in other words, the starting point. Averroes also adopts this approach. The senses are where objects are first perceived; from there, knowledge is gathered, as it were, by a general “sense” and processed by the imagination, memory, and the faculty of reason. Here, the faculty of reason is of vital importance. The language of *De Anima* III.5, concise yet dense, distinguishes the activating function of the agent intellect from the receptive structure of the possible intellect, but does not determine with full clarity the ontological status of these two principles. This deliberate, or at least productive, ambiguity in the text made it possible in later centuries to draw rival metaphysical conclusions from the same passage. The comparison of the agent intellect to light and of the possible intellect to that which can receive illumination is not exhausted by its epistemological function. It simultaneously opens the ontological question of which element is to be regarded as immanent to the human soul and which as separate or transcendent. Hence the principal division within the post-Aristotelian commentary tradition concerns less the literal content of Aristotle’s statement than the theoretical indeterminacy he leaves behind. Averroes interprets that indeterminacy in the direction of separate and common intellects; Aquinas, by contrast, interprets it in the direction of the intrinsic powers of the individual soul. Thus the same point of departure in the text becomes the starting point of two different systems: one giving priority to objective correctness and the purity of the intelligible, the other to the unity of the subject and the reality of individual thinking. The distinction between the Active Intellect and the Potential Intellect mentioned in *De Anima* III.5 can actually be interpreted as a turning point in the tradition of commentary on Aristotle’s legacy. The metaphor of light in the text is presented as the fundamental principle that leads the Active Intellect to thought and, consequently, to knowledge, while the Potential Intellect is depicted as the knower in a potential state. However, the question of whether these reside within the knowing subject’s soul or outside of it remains unresolved.

Consequently, the transition from particularity to universal rationality necessitates the acceptance of a principle that cannot be reduced to physical power. For Averroes, it is here that the Agent Intellect enters the process. Through its guidance, the meanings acquired by the cogitative power through imagination are transformed into intelligible form.

The transition from sensory particularity to intellectual universality, for this reason, requires, according to Averroes, a principle above bodily powers. This role belongs to the Agent Intellect. Through its illumination, the stripped meanings

prepared by the cogitative power become intelligible in act. What is decisive for Averroes, however, is that the resulting intelligible does not settle in the soul of the individual subject as a special form belonging to him. In his view, the intelligible in act comes to exist in the separate Material Intellect, perpetually actualized by the light of the Agent Intellect. For this reason, the Material Intellect is thought of as the locus in which universal forms acquire continuity; and the ground of common intelligibility is established precisely there (Duman, 2021, pp. 40–66). From Averroes’s standpoint, this point should be seen not as a secondary reading imposed upon him, but as the most decisive moment of his approach. In this context, the unity of the Corporeal Intellect should be read as the ontological condition and ground of the possibility that demonstrative validity remain universal. Hence this approach should not be read as a theory that renders the human act of knowing passive or external to the subject. His objection, therefore, is directed not at the fact of intellection as such, but at the final ontological locus of the intelligible.

Viewed in general terms, this approach may be understood as resting on three closely connected premises, each of which gives support to the others. First, since science is a universal form of knowledge, it must be based on a common intellectual foundation that transcends individual entities. Second, if the active intellect is understood as an intrinsic element of individual human beings, it loses its universality. Third, the act of knowing is not merely a sensory process but a complex structure in which the sensory and the non-sensory work together. Within this framework, when Averroes’s view is read within its own conceptual coherence, it appears more consistent than what subsequent reductionist interpretations have suggested. For this approach aims to preserve both Aristotelian realism and the unity of science simultaneously in the face of a multitude of knowing subjects.

3. The Transformation of the Problem of Intellect in the Post-Aristotelian Commentary Tradition and Aquinas’s Critique

If, from a formal perspective, the faculty of understanding is grounded in a single, distinct intellect, the claim that the human faculty of understanding is the sole, true, and unique subject remains a feeble assertion. Such an approach is incompatible with Aristotle’s view of humanity as interpreted by Aquinas; the resulting picture, in his view, becomes a paradoxical one where theological principles—such as eternal life, accountability, and divine justice—dominate. In his *De Unitate In-*

telleetus Contra Averroistas (1270), written against Averroism and the Averroists, Aquinas constructs the ground of his critique through precisely these concerns. His point of departure is directed less to the location of the intelligible than to its status. In his view, the presence of the same intelligible species in more than one intellect does not abolish the universal. What corrupts the universal is multiplicity considered under material conditions. Multiplicity as multiplicity does not destroy universality (Aquinas, 1968).

If there were only one intellect for all human beings, then the distinct acts of judging, knowing, and willing could not belong to different individuals. This is another of Aquinas's fundamental objections. He develops the point through the example of teacher and student. If, as Averroes is said to hold, intelligibles were located in a single common intellect, then teacher and student could not participate in a genuine and shared act of learning. This approach cannot prevent learning from becoming intertwined with recall. Consequently, the effectiveness of the common language diminishes.

According to Aquinas, what prevails is not a single common entity but a common intellectual object. For, in his view, truth cannot preserve its universality by existing in a single mind. Its efficacy and existence lie not in a single mind but in the known object. Consequently, Aquinas's approach is significant not so much for its philosophical aspects as for its theological dominance. This is also the dimension of his theological objection. He believes that the meaning of the realities of the soul's (the rational aspect's) immortality and divine judgment can only be found through their consolidation in the individual soul. (Taylor, 1999, pp. 167–169; Dewan, 1996, pp. 128–129). In his view, a separate intellect that performs the real act of understanding would strip the human being of his status as the subject of thought and reduce him to a mere instrument of thinking. For this reason, he insists that intellect is an intrinsic, subsistent, and immaterial power of each rational soul.

As Taylor points out, however, the premises on which Aquinas's objection rests are not shared by Averroes. For that reason, the limits of the objection must be properly understood. Aquinas assumes, first, that intelligibles in act can exist in a plurality of intellects without losing anything of their universality and, second, that genuine knowing requires these intelligibles to be present within the individual soul. These two assumptions are entirely intelligible within a Thomistic hylomorphism. Yet they do not by themselves sustain an objection against the view according to which phantasms and images provide a material contribution, while the act itself belongs to the separate corporeal intellect. The force of the objection must rather be linked to the metaphysical horizon from which it proceeds.

The most evident disagreement between the two thinkers concerns not merely the question whether intellect is one or many, but where intelligibles in act are to be located and what sort of mode of being they must possess. Both thinkers agree with Aristotle that intellect is directed toward the universal, whereas sense remains attached to particulars. It is at this stage that the deeper disagreement emerges. Aquinas holds that immaterial forms can be present in many individual intellects without any diminution of their universal character. Averroes, by contrast, argues that reception within an individuated subject would already bear the trace of particularity. Aquinas grounds the subject's actual knowledge in the unity of the known object; Averroes, however, introduces the Active Intellect at this point. In the Thomistic perspective, the first form of unity grounds the continuity of the personal subject as agent and the immortality of the soul. In the Averroean perspective, the second form of unity secures the continuity of science, its shared communicability, and its universal validity. It may therefore be said that each position seeks to preserve a value that the other tends to place in relative jeopardy.

4. A Common Intellect and the Universality of Science

Averroes's insistence on a single Material Intellect may be read as a direct consequence of his understanding of universality. The intelligible in act, once it exists in a particular human being, becomes, precisely in that mode of existence, the intelligible of a particular subject. When this happens, its universality is compromised. The intelligible can no longer remain above the accidents of individual cognition, but is reduced to a private event. For this reason, Averroes places intelligibles in act only in the one eternal and incorporeal intellect. Even so, individual subjects participate in the process through the cogitative faculty. What Averroes fundamentally seeks to preserve is the univocity of the known object. In his view, knowledge remains secure and independent only to the extent that it remains abstract, pure, and free from the accidents of individual acts. This is perhaps the sole reason why the Corporeal Intellect is indispensable for him. If universals were present in the souls of individual subjects as "contents," they would be drawn down to the level of subjectivation and thereby deprived of the universality claimed by truth and science (Taylor, 1999, pp. 160–167). At this point the disagreement with Aquinas becomes even clearer. Aquinas asks where the form is located in the knower.

Perhaps Aquinas sought to ground the idea that God, as "reason," could

exist simultaneously in many subjects by reinterpreting the relationship between the universal and the particular. For he argues that the universal can exist in virtually all minds without losing its essential nature. Consequently, it can exist in many souls at the same time. In contrast, Averroes' primary focus is on the question of how form can remain universal in the real sense:

Therefore, as the species of colors are in the sight, so are the species of phantasms in the possible intellect. Now it is clear that because the colors, the images of which are in the sight, are on a wall, the action of seeing is not attributed to the wall: for we do not say that the wall sees, but rather that it is seen. Therefore, from the fact that the species of phantasms are in the possible intellect, it does not follow that Socrates, in whom are the phantasms, understands, but that he or his phantasms are understood. (Aquinas, ST 76, 1,c)

This demonstrates the consistency of Aquinas's theological and philosophical approach—which defines humanity as the “union of body and soul” (hylomorphism) and centers on reason (rationality) and free will—with his anthropology. Human beings are understood as the “*imago Dei*” (the image of God), formed by the soul giving form (shape) to the body, possessing both material and spiritual dimensions. (Aquinas, 1968)

For this reason, Aquinas's rejection of Averroes cannot be reduced to a merely technical correction within philosophical psychology. It belongs to a broader metaphysical and theological picture in which thought is genuinely attributable to the person. In his hands, the problem of intellect becomes inseparable from the problem of the human subject.

4.1. Shared Knowledge, Science, and Common Meaning

These different ontologies of intellect, as one would expect, produce different conceptions of science. For Averroes, scientific knowledge requires one and the same intelligible referent for everyone who participates in demonstration. If supposedly identical universals were multiplied across many intellects, it would become difficult to secure their identity. In the best case one would have parallel concepts; in the worst case, an explanatory regress would emerge in which yet another principle would need to be sought in order to explain their sameness. For this reason, in Averroes's view, the unity of science depends on the unity of the intellect in which intelligibles exist in act (Taylor, 1999, pp. 165–167).

Aquinas, by contrast, grounds this unity elsewhere. Science is one because the essence is known by many intellects, not because the intelligible is present numerically within one separate subject. What is decisive here is the identity of the form in nature: its abstraction from matter and its immaterial reception. Aquinas argues that the act of knowing is a cognitive process; he maintains that perception is personal because each knowing subject knows through their own intellect, yet at the same time, the active intellect preserves universality. Consequently, he appears to defend the universality of truth without setting aside the personal nature of knowing.

4.2. Beyond Polemic: Broader Philosophical Consequences

When the approaches put forward by these two thinkers are examined on a philosophical level, two distinct acts of knowing actually emerge. Aquinas argues that cognition is intrinsic to all subjects—who are endowed with reason. Averroes, however, points to the Active Intellect. Aquinas argues that universality is not a subjective quality but rather a substantial principle inherent in things themselves. “Humanity” is one and the same in particulars, yet it exists in different modes of being across distinct individuals. (Toktaş, 2003; Çetinkaya, 2023).

De Unitate Intellectus has traditionally been regarded in the Scholastic period as a powerful and even devastating critique of Averroes and, in particular, of the Latin Averroists. However, a philosophical perspective reveals that this is not the case, at least in the details. It appears that the fundamental premises upon which Aquinas based his critiques of Averroes rest on assumptions that the opposing side did not actually make. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that Aquinas criticized him on an anthropological basis with solid evidence. Recent studies in particular (Taylor, 1999; Bazan, 1981; Black, 1993) suggest that Aquinas’s criticisms were more of an external critique rather than one rooted in the internal dynamics of Averroes’s approach. Indeed, Aquinas’s critique rests on the assumption that the individual mind contains a plurality of rational beings—as actual entities—without any diminution of the individual’s universal aspects, and that true knowledge is immanent in their souls. These assumptions are also indispensable parts of his metaphysics. However, this is precisely what Averroes does not accept. It is possible to interpret this not only as a refutation directed at Averroes but also as a different/alternative epistemological approach.

In his study on Aquinas’s use of the term “*intellectum speculativum*,” Bazan argues that Aquinas employs this concept within the framework of his “*species in-*

telligibilis” approach—as an intrinsic principle within the individual intellect, yet applied in a speculative manner. Yet this is not Averroes’s meaning. In the Averroean account, speculative intelligibles exist in act not as individuated forms located in the human soul, but only in the separate Material Intellect (Bazan, 1981, p. 432; see also Taylor, 1999, pp. 150–151). Once this distinction is blurred, Aquinas runs the risk of answering not Averroes’s actual position but rather a Thomistic construction of Averroism.

Black reaches a similar conclusion from the side of psychology and self-awareness. Aquinas presupposes a model of epistemic ownership according to which understanding must take place in the individual subject and as that subject’s own act. Averroes, however, can reject this premise without denying the human role in cognition. On his account, the human being prepares phantasms and meanings, while the formal act of intellection belongs to the separate intellect working together with these bodily powers (Black, 1993, pp. 366–379). For this reason, the formula *homo intelligit* is not as self-evident as Aquinas sometimes makes it seem, for everything depends on what is counted as the true bearer of the act of understanding.

Before moving on to the conclusion, I would like to touch upon the contribution of recent research on this issue to our understanding of the problem. Taylor, in particular, stands out in this regard. He argues that the dispute in question is based not merely on a difference in interpretation, but on a structural foundation. According to him, both thinkers proceed from different starting points, different ontologies of the mind, and different criteria regarding the nature of knowledge. He characterizes this situation as two distinct architectural frameworks presented by the two sides of the dispute. More accurately, it would be more precise to describe them as two distinct philosophical architectures. (Taylor, 1999, p. 175 ff.) Accordingly, Aquinas’s argument is decisive only for readers who have already accepted the premises on which he relies: that what is intelligible can exist in more than one mind without diminishing, that intellect must be intrinsic to the human soul, and that moral agency is tied to cognition in this strictly personal sense. Instead, if we take Averroes’s concern for preserving a single ontological locus for universal forms as our starting point, the structure of the argument changes significantly, and Aquinas’s objections lose much of their definitive character. Drawing further on Taylor, a methodological conclusion can also be derived from this situation based on philosophical principles. Accordingly, Averroes should be viewed not merely as an alternative reading of the scholastic “paradigm,” but as a systematic philosopher who plays a dominant role in addressing the aforementioned issues. Thus, the significance of the matter—which is claimed to remain relevant today—lies in the fact

that neither approach has yet lost its philosophical productivity.

Conclusion

The disagreement between Averroes and Aquinas is not just a familiar episode in the history of Aristotelian psychology. It exposes two different metaphysical accounts of knowledge, each shaped by a distinct answer to the question of how universal intelligibility becomes possible. Averroes defends the unity of a separate Material Intellect because he regards that unity as the only adequate basis for the universality and objectivity of science. Aquinas insists on a plurality of intellects because he takes individual intellectual subjecthood to be indispensable for understanding, moral agency, and the theological destiny of the human person. The issue at stake is not only the interpretation of Aristotle, but the ontological status of thought itself.

The central argument of this article has been that Aquinas does not refute Averroes on fully shared premises. What he does is replace one account of knowledge with another. The studies of Bazan, Black, and Taylor help to clarify why this is the case. Aquinas's criticisms depend, at decisive points, on assumptions that Averroes does not accept. The most important of these concerns the status of intelligibles in act. Aquinas assumes that they may exist in a plurality of human intellects without losing their universality. Averroes denies precisely this possibility. In his view, once intelligibles are multiplied across individual subjects, their claim to strict universality becomes unstable. A science that is genuinely universal cannot rest on acts that are numerically dispersed in many intellects unless one can show how such dispersion leaves universality untouched. Aquinas offers a response, but the response belongs to a different conceptual framework. The disagreement does not unfold within a single shared account of knowledge. It marks the point at which two frameworks diverge. This makes it difficult to describe the confrontation as a straightforward philosophical victory. Each position is internally ordered. Each preserves something that the other places under strain. Averroes aims to secure the public and universal character of science. Aquinas aims to secure the human being as the true subject of understanding. These are not peripheral concerns. They define the center of each thinker's project. Averroes asks how universal truth can remain fully universal if it is distributed among many individual knowers. Aquinas asks how thought, judgment, praise, blame, and beatitude can belong to the human person if understanding is not properly the act of that person. What separates them is not a minor disagreement about terminology, but a difference in what each takes to be philosophically primary.

Averroes should not be read as a merely negative figure within the Latin tradition. His doctrine of intellect forces into view a set of problems that remain philosophically serious. Shared meaning, the public status of truth, and the possibility of a transpersonal order of reason all come into focus through his account. His position tests the limits of any theory that wishes to affirm both the universality of science and the plurality of knowers. If the same intelligible content is known by many, one still has to explain what makes that sameness more than a verbal convenience. One also has to explain how truth can be common without being reduced to a collection of parallel private acts. Averroes gives those questions their sharpest medieval form, and for that reason his theory cannot be dismissed as a historical curiosity or a merely erroneous detour. Aquinas's reply remains no less powerful. Its strength lies in the precision with which it binds cognition to personhood. For Aquinas, understanding belongs irreducibly to the individual human being. The intellect is not an impersonal site in which thought occurs; it is a power of the rational soul. This claim carries consequences well beyond psychology. Ethical accountability presupposes that the subject who knows is also the subject who chooses. Theological anthropology presupposes that the being ordered toward beatitude is the same being that understands truth. Once thought is detached from the concrete person, the unity of intellectual, moral, and spiritual life becomes difficult to preserve. Aquinas's rejection of Averroes is rooted in this larger vision. He does not simply protect plurality for its own sake. He protects the integrity of the human subject as an intellectual and moral agent.

The force of the debate comes from the fact that each thinker secures one dimension of the problem by placing pressure on another. Averroes safeguards the unity and objectivity of science, yet does so at the cost of weakening the individuality of the knowing subject. Aquinas secures the person as the bearer of intellection, yet from an Averroistic standpoint this makes the strict universality of thought harder to explain. Neither position leaves the other untouched. Each reveals what the other must account for more fully. That mutual pressure gives the controversy its enduring philosophical importance.

What emerges from this study is not a resolved medieval quarrel, but a durable philosophical tension. Reason may be understood through shared intelligibility, or through personal intellection. Any serious account of knowledge must still explain how those two dimensions belong together. Universal truth must be more than a private event, yet knowledge must also belong to someone. Thought must be common enough to ground science and personal enough to ground responsibility. The dispute between Averroes and Aquinas remains vital because it formulates this

tension with unusual clarity. Its continued relevance lies in the fact that the problem it presents has not disappeared

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