

Chapter 7

Intellectual Beatitude in the Averroist Tradition: The Case of Agostino Nifo

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In a passage of the third book of *De anima*, traditionally known as text 36, Aristotle tantalised his readers with the promise: ‘The question of whether or not the intellect can, when not itself separate from [spatial] magnitude, think anything that is separate should be considered later.’¹ This passage suggests the possibility of incorporeal beings as objects of thought, that is to say, of the human intellect thinking incorporeal beings by taking hold of their form. Arabic philosophers, and particularly Averroes, maintained that the ultimate goal of our life consisted in the knowledge of the separate substances through conjunction with those intelligences. The idea of an intellectual beatitude rapidly spread in the Latin West, but was not always formulated in terms of a conjunction with the separate substances.² The first Renaissance author to formulate an extensive and explicit defence of the Averroistic view of intellectual beatitude was probably Agostino Nifo. Here, I present a close reading of Averroes’s exegesis of the above-mentioned passage,³ and a brief analysis of its echoes in the Latin West. Then, Nifo’s doctrine of intellectual beatitude in book VI of *De intellectu* (1503) is outlined.

¹ Aristotle, *De anima*, III.7, 431b 17–19.

² However, an interesting case is that of Thomas Aquinas, who in his comment on *IV Sent.* accepts the Arabic teachings on knowing the separate substances as a model for the knowledge of God face-to-face. See below note 29.

³ For a discussion of intellectual happiness in commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, see Georg Wieland, ‘The Perfection of Man: On the Cause, Mutability, and Permanence of Human Happiness in 13th Century Commentaries on the *Ethica nicomachea* (EN)’, in *Il commento filosofico nell’Occidente latino (secoli XIII–XV)*, eds Gianfranco Fioravanti, Claudio Leonardi and Stefano Perfetti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), pp. 359–377.

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Happiness and the Knowledge of Separate Substances in Averroes

Averroes tackles the issue of conjunction⁴ with the agent intellect and the knowledge of the separate substances in several works. His most extensive treatment of the issue is in his *De anima* commentary, book III, text 36.⁵ In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, he argues that if it were impossible for the (human) intellect to know separate substances, nature would have acted in vain having produced beings that by their very nature are intelligible and yet are not known.⁶ In the treatise *De animae beatitudine*, at least in the versions that circulated in the West since the Middle Ages,⁷ Averroes presents the beatitude of the soul as an ascent to the separate intellects, evolving in the frame of a larger hierarchy, which extends from God through the second causes (intelligences), the agent intellect, the soul, to form and matter. However, this work is also devoted to other topics and does not offer any fundamentally new insights for the issue under scrutiny. Therefore, I shall concentrate on the analysis in the Long Commentary.

⁴The term is also used for the relationship between individual human beings and the material intellect, and for that between the material intellect and the intentions of the imagination. See Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, ed. F. Stuart Crawford (Cambridge, MA: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953), III, t/c 4–5, pp. 383–413. Besides *continuatio* and *coniunctio* Averroes also used the term *adeptio*, which al-Fārābī used in the context of an emanationist view of reality (which Averroes rejected), as a synonym of the two other terms. See Jean-Baptiste Brenet, 'Perfection de la philosophie ou philosophe parfait? Jean de Jandun lecteur d'Averroès', *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 68 (2001), pp. 310–348 (313–314, note 12).

⁵Other treatments are in an appendix later added to the Madrid manuscript of Averroes's early *Epitome on De anima*, and in another early work which survives only in Hebrew. For the problem of conjunction in Islamic philosophy and further references, see Deborah H. Black, 'Conjunction and the Identity of Knower and Known in Averroes', *American Catholic Philosophical Society*, 73 (1999), pp. 161–184 (161, note 2, 164–166, and 180–181, note 47). See also Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 321–340; Alfred L. Ivry, 'Averroes on Intellection and Conjunction', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 86 (1966), pp. 76–85.

⁶Aristotle, *Opera cum Averrois commentariis*, 12 vols (Venice: Giunta, 1562 [first edition 1550–1552]; repr. Frankfurt: Minerva, 1962), VIII, I, cap. 1: 'Sed hoc non demonstrat res abstractas intelligere esse impossibile nobis, sicut inspicere solem est impossibile vespertiloni, quia si ita esset, otiose gisset natura.'

⁷This work which survives under the name of Averroes is in fact a compilation based on two letters on the conjunction with the agent intellect; it puts forth a doctrine inspired by the work of Al-Farabi. Both letters survive in Hebrew and were translated in Latin at the end of the thirteenth century in Italy. It was rediscovered by Alessandro Achillini, who published a revised version, later used by Nifo while preparing his own edition. For a thorough analysis of the origin and versions of this work, see Averroes, *La béatitude de l'âme*, eds and trans. Marc Geoffroy and Carlos Steel (Paris: Vrin, 2001).

In his commentary on text 36 of book III, Averroes begins by dividing the issue into two further questions, that is, (1) whether the intellect knows abstract entities, and (2) whether the intellect, when linked to the human body, is able to know abstract entities, taking for granted that it is able to do so when it exists ‘on its own’. According to Averroes, Themistius merely addresses the latter issue, while he intends to discuss both, defining this scrutiny as ‘valde difficilis et ambigua’.⁸ As to the first point, he raises the issue that if the intellect is viewed as corruptible, it cannot have any knowledge of abstract being. Indeed, Alexander holds that the intellect that knows the separate contents is neither the material intellect, nor the habitual intellect, but the ‘intellectus adeptus’, which is here implicitly assimilated to the ‘intellectus ab extrinseco’. However, this merely presents a different perspective on the same issue, since one may now wonder how this separate intellect relates to man. These problems explain, according to Averroes, the contradictions between Alexander’s *De anima* and his treatise *De intellectu*,⁹ as in the latter work he states that the material intellect, when it has completed its knowledge of the sensible world, may know the agent intellect.

Averroes formulates a first assessment of Alexander’s position, suggesting a solution to the questions under scrutiny: when the material intellect knows all material forms, the agent intellect becomes its form and through a ‘continuatio’ with this separate substance the material intellect may know ‘other’, that is, abstract entities and thus become ‘intellectus adeptus’.¹⁰ However, this position also does not explain how the corruptible (material) intellect receives as its form the eternal (agent) intellect. Averroes points out similar contradictions in the works of Alexander’s Arabic followers, that is to say al-Fārābī¹¹ and Ibn Bājja (Lat. Avempace).¹² Therefore, he proposes an alternative which might settle the issue: the material intellect is connected to us through the forms of the imagination, while this very same intellect is connected to the agent intellect ‘in another fashion’.¹³

Subsequently, Averroes makes a new start recalling that the source of all ambiguity lays in the fact that Aristotle never examined the matter thoroughly in any of his works. After a brief overview of Ibn Bājja’s relevant works, Averroes begins by analysing the position of Themistius who argued that the human intellect’s knowledge of material forms simply grounds leads to its capacity of knowing abstract entities, as the latter are characterised by a higher kind of intelligibility and thus far more easy to grasp. Yet, so Averroes rebukes, this argument does not hold when the

⁸ Averroes, *Commentarium magnum*, pp. 480–481.

⁹ See Bernardo Bazàn, ‘L’authenticité du *De intellectu* attribué à Alexandre d’Aphrodise’, *Revue philosophique de Louvain*, 71 (1973), pp. 468–487.

¹⁰ Averroes, *Commentarium magnum*, pp. 481–484.

¹¹ Elsewhere in his Long Commentary, Averroes criticised al-Fārābī for not admitting the knowledge of separate substances. See Averroes, *Commentarium magnum*, p. 433.

¹² Averroes cites his *On the Conjunction of the Intellect with Man*; for an edition of the Arabic text, see Ibn Bājja, *Opera metaphysica*, ed. Majid Fakhri (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1968), pp. 155–173.

¹³ Averroes, *Commentarium magnum*, pp. 484–486.

human intellect is considered a ‘virtus in corpore’, but only when it is viewed as immaterial. He then raises a further issue: why does the knowledge of separate substances need a period of intellectual growth, and occurs only at an older age? For Alexander such a process is easily explained, since a ‘*complementum in generatione*’ is typical for all natural beings. This leads to yet another difficulty, however: why should the knowledge of separate substances be a *complementum actionis* for the human intellect? In this Averroes once again challenges the fuzzy relationship between material, habitual and agent intellects, which compromises the knowledge of eternal beings by a material entity.¹⁴

Averroes now returns to the position of Ibn Bājja, who – quite enigmatically, at least in the Latin version of Averroes’s exposition – held that the ‘*intellecta speculativa sunt facta*,’ that ‘*omne factum habet quidditatem*’, and finally that ‘*omne habens quidditatem, intellectus innatus est extrahere illam quidditatem*’. This causal connection allows the human intellect to extract the form of the (separate) intellects and their quiddities. After a brief reference to al-Fārābī, Averroes explains that, according to Ibn Bājja, this process of abstracting quiddities cannot go on indefinitely, but that it necessarily stops at contents without any quiddity at all, that is, those which coincide with their own quiddity: ‘*intellectus perveniat ad quidditatem non habentem quidditatem; et quod tale est forma abstracta*.’ In a similar vein, al-Fārābī held that no infinite series of abstract entities exists between the habitual intellect and the agent intellect, but only the acquired intellect.¹⁵ Averroes notes that this kind of argumentation only holds if a univocity between the quiddities of material and immaterial beings is given. However, even if the univocity were to be accepted, this view fails to explain how a corruptible intellect may grasp immaterial beings. Furthermore, granted that the material intellect knows abstract entities, why is this kind of knowledge not a ‘regular’ part of the speculative sciences? Indeed, Ibn Bājja wavered as he distinguished between natural and supernatural powers in his *Epistola expeditionis*, while in his *Epistola continuationis* he clearly ascribed the knowledge of separate substances to the speculative sciences. And yet, why do only very few human beings arrive at this kind of knowledge: is it due to ignorance or to a lack of experience, that is, to a ‘diminution of our nature’? The latter answer suggests that man is said equivocally, while the former entails that the speculative sciences are not perfect.¹⁶

At this point, Averroes introduces his own solution based on the distinction of two intellectual operations, namely a passive one (*intelligere*) and an active one (extracting forms from matter) which precedes the passive one. A similar distinction probably pushed Themistius to view the habitual intellect as composed of material and agent intellect, and equally Alexander to view the acquired intellect as composed of agent and habitual intellect. Averroes then states that intellection may be either natural, i.e., derived from first propositions, or voluntary, that is, consisting of acquired cognitive contents. In both cases, the *intellecta speculativa* are the product

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 486–490.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 490–493.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 493–495.

of an ‘*actio facta ex congregato*’, and therefore in this action a form and a matter can be distinguished. The notions of form and matter are not to be viewed as similar to those of natural processes: they qualify the proportion or disposition of the entities involved.¹⁷

Thus, a serial construction of couples of matter and form are pointed out: (a) the link between the imaginative forms and the agent intellect in the generation of *intellecta speculativa* representing the material world; (b) the connection of the habitual intellect (which consists of *intellecta speculativa*, that is, the cognitive contents of the sensible world) and the agent intellect in the generation of *intellecta speculativa* representing abstract entities. In Averroes’s view, the objection that corruptible entities cannot grasp abstract entities does not affect this construction because (1) he views the material intellect as eternal and separate, and (2) he considers the habitual intellect as corruptible only in a certain respect.

Averroes holds that all sorts of connections between superior and inferior entities are characterised by the form-matter relationship. Thus, the agent intellect may become the form of the *intellecta speculativa* derived from sensible knowledge, and through this conjunction the human being acquires knowledge of separate substances and becomes similar to God.¹⁸ It should be borne in mind that in this construction the *continuatio* or *copulatio* causes the intellection, and not the other way round. Indeed, that the agent intellect is both efficient and formal cause of the material intellect does not entail two chronologically distinct acts. The possibility of conjunction exists from the outset, but needs to be actualised.¹⁹ As a matter of fact, Averroes also uses the term ‘conjunction’ to qualify the identification of subject and object at every stage of perception and cognition. The agent intellect is always in the process of becoming our form, precisely insofar as it enters into our cognitive identification with other things. Thus conjunction, it would seem, is treated by Averroes as a special cognitive act in which the separate substance closest to us, the agent intellect, is known by us as the culmination of our philosophical learning, and through it we are able to know the other separate substances. However, conjunction cannot be a search for cognitive identification with the agent intellect, for the agent intellect is never an object of our knowledge in itself, but rather is part of the very fabric of all our intelligibles.²⁰ In this way, two earlier issues can be solved. The knowledge of eternal entities through a ‘new’ intellection can be explained on the basis of the distinction between potential and actual knowledge, and the fact that the knowledge of abstract entities takes place in time (‘*non in principio, sed postremo*’) is due to the fact that the speculative sciences need to be developed.²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 496–497.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 497–500.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 485 and 489.

²⁰ Black, ‘Conjunction and the Identity of Knower and Known in Averroes’, p. 182.

²¹ Averroes, *Commentarium magnum*, p. 501. For further discussion of the texts and issues analysed in this section, see Averroes, *Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, eds Richard C. Taylor and Thérèse-Anne Druart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), in particular pp. LXIX–LXXVI.

Medieval Developments: From Thomas Aquinas to John of Jandun

From the thirteenth century on, the notion of intellectual beatitude spread rapidly in Western philosophy, but not all authors subscribing to this Aristotelian view endorsed the doctrine of the intellect's conjunction to separate substances after a full actualization of the possible intellect.²² Some thirteenth-century philosophers, such as Boethius of Dacia in his *De summo bono*, simply did not address the question.²³ Remarkably, Albertus Magnus qualified the issue of the possible knowledge of separate substances as the most important of all questions concerning the soul,²⁴ and in his solution to the problem comes very close to Averroes's position.²⁵ The way he describes supreme happiness as residing in contemplation is surprisingly similar to the position that would be defended some ten years later by some philosophers in the Faculty of Arts in Paris and condemned as dangerous Averroism.²⁶

²² Recently, a controversy has sparked over how to interpret the conjunction among medievalist scholars, in particular Luca Bianchi and Alain de Libera. For a discussion, see Maria Bettetini, 'Introduzione: La felicità nel Medioevo', in *La felicità nel Medioevo*, eds Maria Bettetini and Francesco D. Paparella (Louvain-la-Neuve: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, 2005), pp. VIII–X.

²³ Boethius of Dacia, *De summo bono*, in Boethius of Dacia, *Opuscula*, ed. Niels J. Green-Pedersen (Copenhagen: Gad, 1976), pp. 369–377.

²⁴ Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, ed. Clemens Stroick, in *Opera omnia*, 40 vols, eds Bernhard Geyer et al. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1951–), vol. VII.1, tract. 3, cap. 6, p. 215.

²⁵ Albert keeps some distance from Averroes, but only insofar as his position seems not to be supported by Aristotle's texts. Cf. Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, tract. 3, cap. 11, p. 221. For a discussion, see Carlos Steel, 'Medieval Philosophy: An Impossible Project? Thomas Aquinas and the "Averroistic" Ideal of Happiness', in *Was ist Philosophie in Mittelalter?*, eds Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1998), pp. 152–174 (159).

²⁶ Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, tract. 3, cap. 12, pp. 224–225: 'Et ideo etiam in dubium venit, sicut SUPRA diximus, utrum intellectus, secundum quod est in nobis coniunctus imaginationi et sensui, posset aliquid separatum intelligere; intellectus enim post mortem constat, quod intelligit separata. Et nos diximus in illa quaestione, quod nobis videbatur, quoniam nobis videtur, quod in hac vita continuatur cum agente formaliter, et tunc per agentem intelligit separata, quia aliter felicitas contemplativa non attingeretur ab homine in hac vita; et hoc est contra omnes PERIPATETICOS, qui dicunt, quod fiducia contemplantium est ut formam attingere intellectum agentem. Est enim, sicut SUPRA diximus, triplex status nostri intellectus, scilicet in potentia et in profectioe potentiae ad actum et in adeptioe. In potentia autem existens nullo modo attingit agentem sicut formam, sed dum proficit, tunc movetur ad coniunctionem cum adepto, et tunc, quantum habet de intellectis, tantum est coniunctus, et quantum caret eis, tantum est non coniunctus. Habitis autem omnibus intelligibilibus in toto est coniunctus et tunc vocatur adeptus. Et sic sunt differentiae intellectus nostri quattuor: Quorum primus est possibilis vocatus intellectus, secundus autem universaliter agens et tertius speculativus et quartus adeptus. Accessus autem ex naturae aptitudine ad adeptum vocatur subtilitas, et expeditus usus adepti in actu vocatur sollertia; subtilitas autem causatur ex splendore intelligentiae super possibilem ex natura; sollertia autem est bona dispositio velociter inveniendi multas causas.' Cf. *Super Ethica*, in *Opera*, XIV.2, pp. 774–75.

Also Siger of Brabant, as far as Nifo's testimony can be trusted,²⁷ endorsed the thesis of direct knowledge of separate substances and eventually of God.²⁸ In contrast, this view was refuted by Thomas Aquinas, who accepted the Arabic conception of knowing the separate substances as a model for the vision of God in his commentary on the Sentences,²⁹ but challenged the foundations of philosophical happiness in his *Summa contra Gentiles*: all human knowledge 'in this state' is sense-bound, and thus our grasp of the realm of insensible, immaterial reality remains imperfect, as it is based on inference.³⁰ In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Aquinas rejects Averroes's view that nature would have acted in vain if the human intellect could not reach knowledge of the separate substances. First, separate substances are not designed to be known by our intellect. Second, though we may not know them, they are known by other intellects.³¹ Then, in 1277 Averroes's view was condemned by Etienne Tempier, the bishop of Paris.³² Nonetheless, the doctrine remained a topic of discussion and, in some cases, expanded upon by other authors, among whom Thomas Wylton,³³ Duns Scotus,³⁴ John of Jandun, Rudolph Brito,³⁵ Ferrandus of Spain,³⁶

²⁷ See Agostino Nifo, *De intellectu*, ed. Leen Spruit (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 'Introduction', pp. 18–24.

²⁸ See Agostino Nifo, *De intellectu libri sex. Eiusdem de demonibus libri tres* (Venice: Girolamo Scoto, 1554), book VI, ch. 12; for a discussion, see Carlos Steel, 'Siger of Brabant versus Thomas Aquinas on the Possibility of Knowing the Separate Substances', in *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277: Philosophie und Theologie an der Universität von Paris im letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts*, eds Jan A. Aertsen, Kent Emery, Jr., and Andreas Speer (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2001), pp. 211–232.

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *In IV. Sent.*, dist. 49, q. 2, a. 1. For discussion, see Jan-Baptiste Brenet, 'S'unir à l'intellect, voir Dieu: Averroès et la doctrine de la jonction au cœur du Thomisme', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 21 (2011), pp. 215–247.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, chs. 26–45, in particular chs. 41–45. See also Thomas Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, eds Marie-Raymond Cathala and Raimondo M. Spiazzi (Turin: Marietti, 1964), lectio 1, n. 285. For Aquinas on highest happiness in this life, cf. *In Eth. Nic.*, X, lectio 13; cf. I, lectio 10.

³¹ Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, II, lectio 1, n. 286, p. 82. For additional arguments from other works and for discussion of Thomas's position, see Steel, 'Medieval Philosophy: An Impossible Project?', pp. 159–160.

³² See theses 40, 154, 157, and 176.

³³ See Thomas Wilton, *Quaestio disputata de anima intellectiva*, ed. Władysław Senko, in *Studia Mediewistyczne*, 5 (1964), pp. 5–190 (86–87).

³⁴ John Duns Scotus, *Questiones super Metaphysicam*, II, q. 3: 'Utrum substantiae immateriales possint intelligi a nobis secundum suas qualitates pro hoc statu?', in *Opera omnia*, a Patribus Franciscanis de observantia accurate recognita, 26 vols (Paris: Louis Vivès, 1891–1895; repr. Westmead, Franborough, and Hants: Gregg International Publishers, 1969), VII, pp. 110–115.

³⁵ Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones in Aristotelis librum tertium De anima*, in Winfried Fauser, *Der Kommentar des Radulphus Brito zur Buch III De anima* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1973), pp. 276–292.

³⁶ Ferrandus Hispanus, *De specie intelligibili*, ed. Zdzisław Kuksewicz, *Medioevo*, 3 (1997), pp. 187–235 (225). See Steel, 'Medieval Philosophy: An Impossible Project?', pp. 168–169.

Henry Bate,³⁷ and James of Pistoia.³⁸ For present purposes, we will focus on Jandun's position, which is of particular interest.³⁹

Jandun addresses the issue in his commentaries on *De anima* and *Metaphysics*.⁴⁰ In his commentary on text 36 in book III of *De anima*, he initially discusses the views of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Ibn Bājja, Averroes, and Thomas Aquinas, and then, he goes on to point out some difficulties. (1) How can the agent intellect become the form of the possible intellect? Either, it is already a form and thus, it cannot change (i.e., become the form of another entity), or it is a subsisting substance and thus, it cannot become the form of another substance (the possible intellect). (2) If some of the intelligible objects are known and others are not, then the agent intellect is only partially the form of the possible intellect, which is to say the least a problematic view. (3) Happiness should be available to all humans, while philosophical beatitude apparently is not. (4) The status of the *intellecta operabilia* and of practical philosophy is uncertain. (5) Knowledge of separate substances seems out of reach for our inferior, human intellect.⁴¹ These objections are all answered and solved. (ad 1–2) The conjunction of agent and possible intellect is to be viewed as 'new' only insofar as (actual) knowledge is concerned. (ad 3) Nothing in human nature is opposed to intellectual beatitude. (ad 4) The objects of speculative cognition pertain to the perfection of the possible intellect, rather than to the practical intellect. (ad 5) Aquinas's arguments do not hold.⁴²

In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Jandun formulates other objections: (a) our intellect only knows what the agent intellect abstracts, while the separate substances are abstract entities *per se*; (b) infinite being transcends the finite; (c) our intellect relates to the separate substances as a blind man does to colours; (d) our intellect does not know what is not permitted to be known (God and separate substances).⁴³ Yet, (ad a) Aristotle discussed the separate substances in book 12 of the *Metaphysics*, (ad b-c) Averroes referred to difficulties to realise this kind of knowledge, not to its impossibility; (ad d) a natural desire cannot be in vain. Following

³⁷ For discussion, see Steel, 'Medieval Philosophy: An Impossible Project?', pp. 161–167; Steel, 'Siger of Brabant versus Thomas Aquinas', pp. 226–227.

³⁸ See Iacobus de Pistorio, *Quaestio de felicitate*, ed. Irene Zavattero, in *La felicità nel medioevo*, pp. 395–409.

³⁹ Some scholars argue that also Siger opposed Thomas in some of his 'lost' works, referred to by Agostino Nifo and reconstructed by Bruno Nardi. For discussion of this issue, see below and the introduction to my edition of Nifo's *De intellectu*, pp. 18–20.

⁴⁰ Among the recent studies on Jandun, in particular as to his relation with Averroes, see Brenet, 'Perfection de la philosophie ou philosophe parfait?' and id., *Transferts du sujet: La noétique d'Averroès selon Jean de Jandun* (Paris: Vrin, 2003), pp. 371–432, for the view of intellectual beatitude.

⁴¹ See John of Jandun, *Super libros de anima subtilissimae quaestiones* (Venice: Heirs of Girolamo Scoto, 1587; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1966), col. 419.

⁴² Jandun, *Super libros De anima*, cols 420–424.

⁴³ John of Jandun, *In duodecim libros metaphysicae* (Venice: Girolamo Scoto, 1553; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1966), fol. 22^v.

this, Jandun returns to the views of the Greek, Arab and Latin masters, and concludes that by means of the acquisition of the agent intellect, the possible intellect is disposed to ascend to knowledge of all separate substances, until it arrives at the intuitive knowledge of God's essence through the 'acquisition' of the agent intellect.⁴⁴ Jandun explains that at the beginning the agent intellect is united to the possible intellect only as the efficient cause of the intelligibles in it, but at the end, after the agent intellect has abstracted and 'filled' the possible intellect with all the intelligible species of material things,⁴⁵ it is united to it as its form.⁴⁶ The possible intellect thus becomes *intellectus adeptus*, knows through the agent intellect God and the other separate substances, and thereby attains its supreme state. Human happiness consists dispositionally in the acquisition of the agent intellect, but formally in the act of wisdom whereby we know God directly and are conformed to him.⁴⁷

Agostino Nifo on Intellectual Beatitude in De Intellectu

Nifo discusses the issue of human happiness in two of his early works: in book 6 of his treatise *De intellectu* and in his commentary on *De animae beatitudine*, a work then attributed to Averroes. These works were based on courses completed in 1492, but their publication came later and only after considerable reworking and self-censorship in an anti-Averroistic sense. *De intellectu* was published in 1503, the edition of and commentary on *De animae beatitudine* in 1508.⁴⁸ Remarkably, in his analysis and view of beatitude Nifo substantially endorses the Averroist position, and his commentary on *De animae beatitudine* contains only some minor pious corrections.

Some preliminary remarks are due. First, the issue of the 'state of the soul' (i.e., human beatitude) concerns several fields of the Aristotelian edifice of learning, namely, psychology, metaphysics, cosmology and ethics, and as a result requires a comparative analysis of several works, chiefly *De anima*, *Nicomachean Ethics*,

⁴⁴ Jandun, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicae*, fols 24^v, 25^v: 'Dicendum quod de Deo potest haberi duplex cognitio, una complexa alia simplex et intuitiva. Modo verum est de cognitione Dei complexa qua cognoscitur quod Deus est actus purus et substantia simpliciter, et sic de aliis, illa procedit ab habitu sapientiae. Sed cognitio simplex intuitiva qua cognoscitur Deus et alia principia abstracta quo ad quidditatem eius, illa bene habetur per adeptionem intellectus agentis, et sic intellexit Commentator.' Cf. Jandun, *Super libros De anima*, III, q. 36, cols 421–24. For the problematic aspects of individual beatitude, see Brenet, 'Perfection de la philosophie ou philosophe parfait?', pp. 344–348.

⁴⁵ For discussion of Jandun's view of intelligible species, see Leen Spruit, *Species Intelligibilis from Perception to Knowledge*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1994–1995), I, pp. 328–337.

⁴⁶ Cf. Jandun, *Super libros De anima*, III, q. 36, cols 416, 418–420.

⁴⁷ Jandun, *In Duodecim Libros Metaphysicae*, I, q. 1, fols 1^a–2^a; cf. XII, q. 4, fol. 130^a. For discussion, see Edward P. Mahoney, 'John of Jandun and Agostino Nifo on Human Felicity', in *L'homme et son univers au Moyen Âge*, ed. Christian Wenin (Louvain-la-Neuve: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1986), pp. 465–477 (467–468).

⁴⁸ For this compilation, see note 7 above.

De caelo, and *Metaphysics*. Nifo also drew on a vast number of other sources, discussing a broad range of theories and quoting countless writers, including ancient and biblical literature, Greek and Arabic philosophy, and medieval as well as contemporary, late fifteenth-century thought. Although his main interlocutors were Themistius, Ibn Bājjā, Averroes, Siger of Brabant and John of Jandun, views and strands derived from the Platonic and Hermetic traditions played an important role in Nifo's argumentative strategy. Second, time and again, Nifo's vast erudition stands in the way of a clear and lucid argumentation. The uninhibited display of learning characteristic of Nifo often makes it difficult for him, as it now makes it difficult for us, to determine his own philosophical position. The extremely detailed discussions of the views of other authors, the endless string of solutions and refutations, and in general the lack of balance between *pars destruens* and *pars construens* easily distracts the reader's attention away from his rather succinctly formulated 'true' and, as we hope, personal views. Furthermore, criticisms of authors rarely mean that their views are radically banned, and in the end, Nifo's final conclusions are surprising similar to those of Siger and Jandun, who had been fiercely criticised throughout book 6 of *De intellectu*.

In the first chapters of book 6, Nifo presents and refutes the arguments of those who entertain the mortality of the soul and hold various views regarding beatitude: some hold that it consists of health and beauty (Carneades), other ones deem it richness and good fortune (Diogenes), pleasure (Epicurus), or glory (Stoics).⁴⁹ After a brief reference to the position of the Academics (happiness consists in a coincidence of three kinds of goods, regarding soul, body and fortune, respectively) and that of the Peripatetics (happiness is sought for its own sake), Siger's view in his lost *De foelicitate* is presented (happiness is identified with God, being the highest good and principle of all goods) and refuted with the help of passages from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁵⁰ Following this, Nifo discusses whether God or any separate substance can be known, outlining first Themistius's arguments against knowledge of immaterial beings and then putting forth arguments based on Themistius and Alexander proving that the intellect may grasp separate substances: (1) knowledge of immaterial beings is less burdensome than that of material things; (2) the intellect is in potency to the separate substances; and (3) the intellect may attain this end through a medium, namely the intellect in habit.⁵¹

Subsequently, Nifo presents the doubts Averroes had put forward concerning these arguments: (1) a distinction should be drawn between the intellect taken as intellect and the intellect insofar as it is linked to the human body; (2) if one accepts that the intellect as intellect always knows the separate substances, it cannot be explained why we do not know them from the start but only at the end of our intellectual development. Then, the arguments listed above are defended. Themistius proved that what is possible to the intellect as intellect, is also possible to the human

⁴⁹ Nifo, *De intellectu*, VI, chs. 2–8, fols 53^v–54^r.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, chs. 9–13, fols 54^v–55^r.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, chs. 14–15, fols 55^v.

being: (i) the capabilities of the form extend to its *substratum*, and (ii) the intellect is the first, and thus the final perfection of the human being. He also proved that the intellect, as it knows materials in virtue of abstraction, does not meet any problem in grasping more abstract beings. Furthermore, according to Nifo, Averroes has shown that Alexander's arguments are conclusive if the material intellect is viewed as immaterial and eternal, and the speculative intellect as a dispositional medium for the knowledge of separate substances.⁵²

Nifo lists a series of arguments taken from Ibn Bājjā, derived from Averroes's Long Commentary on *De anima* (see above),⁵³ and further arguments made by Averroes: (i) what is highly desired is attainable, because natural desires are not impossible; (ii) every capability detached from matter may know whatever knowable object; (iii) unknown cognitive objects would exist in vain (*ociose*), that is, without being grasped. He criticises Siger for construing the latter argument solely from the point of view of the intelligences and Jandun for doing the same from the perspective of the human power to understand. Nifo's own view is that Averroes recognised an aptitude for a cognitive union both on the part of the human intellect as well as on that of the separate substances.⁵⁴

In ch. 23, Nifo discusses thirteen fundamental problems concerning Averroes's doctrine, the first four of which are discussed in an extremely detailed way in the chapters 24 to 53.

What is True (Philosophical) Happiness?

First, Nifo presents an (anonymous) position – one quite interesting from a historical point of view – which suggests that beatitude consists formally in the loving of God, more precisely in a love based upon an intuitive knowledge of God. This position is refuted: (i) happiness cannot be an act or operation that is distinct from the essence of the intellect; (ii) the act of happiness is not intuitive love, but primarily comprehension.⁵⁵ After a discussion of yet another position, Averroes's true opinion is exposed as based on the view that the objects of intellect and will are identical, just as intellect and will are but one faculty. Although the intellect grasps its object 'absolutely', while the will does so 'sub indifferentia fugae vel consensus', their happiness is one and the same. God is primarily an object of the intellect, and of the will only insofar as the latter 'contracts' the act of knowledge. Furthermore, inferior intellects may know God in two ways, that is, either through His essence or through

⁵² Ibid., chs. 16–17, fols 55^v–56^r.

⁵³ It is worth remembering here that Ibn Bājjā died when Averroes was only ten years old and that everything known of Ibn Bājjā for the Latins came from the Long Commentary on *De anima* by Averroes.

⁵⁴ Ibid., chs. 18–21, fols 56^r–57^r.

⁵⁵ Ibid., chs. 25–26, fols 57^v–58^r.

the essence of an inferior intellect. Finally, the agent intellect is twofold: God and a level of perfection of the rational soul.⁵⁶ Thus, humans may know God in two ways, through His essence and through the essence of his own intellect:

In the second way, the lower intellect understands (*intelligit*) the higher one through the essence of the lower one. For instance, the intellect of the Moon understands God through the essence of the Moon's intellect, and in this way it understands God Himself, considering that, compared to the intellect of the Moon, God is the agent principle. Therefore, the relationship of the lower intellect to God is as if the lower intellect were the form and the end according to the *secundaria intentio* [i.e., on a conceptual level] and this is what led Siger and his followers astray, for, in one respect, God is the end and the form of all lower intellects, that is, with respect to the *esse intentionale* [i.e., from the point of view of knowledge], in another, He is the agent principle, moved as it were by a second intention, and therefore the lower intellect understands God through its own essence, just as the intellect of the Moon understands God through the essence of the Moon's intellect. I have examined this whole question in my comment of the book *On the Soul*.⁵⁷

Whether the Conjunction is Immediate or Mediate

The discussion of the second issue initially regards the distinction between essence and potencies of the human soul. Given that humans are 'minimum capaces foelicitatis', Nifo asks whether they need any medium, and whether this medium is an intrinsic or extrinsic part of the soul. He refutes Jandun's position, which is based on the mediating role of the speculative intellect, itself made up of intelligible species: (i) the intellect would know the separate substances through accidents (species), not through their essences; (ii) we would not know them through an eternal intellection; (iii) the respective intellections would regard the agent, not the form; (iv) the known being would have an intellect; (v) the agent intellect's 'continuation' would depend upon our knowing; (vi) there would be no new or ancient accident in separate substances except one depending upon material reality. Nifo then presents his own view: just as the intellect of the Moon depends on God in three ways, namely as efficient cause, form and end, the speculative intellect depends upon the separate intellects and thus on God.⁵⁸ The consequence of this argument is that the union with separate intellects is stronger than that between universal and individual, and that God eventually is known as form, when we know Him through His essence:

The speculative intellect depends on the separate substances, and above all on God, according to three meanings of 'cause,' i.e., according to the categories of efficient, formal and final cause. I shall therefore say that, just as the intellect of the Moon understands (*intelligit*) God through the essence of God with respect to the notion of form and end, and through its own essence with respect to the notion of agent, and, as it were, a posteriori, in the same way,

⁵⁶ Ibid., chs. 27–28, fols 58^r–58^v.

⁵⁷ Ibid., ch. 28, fols 58^v.

⁵⁸ Ibid., chs. 29–39, fols 58^v–61^r.

being perfected and formed (*adepti ac formati*) by the speculative intellect, we depend on the separate intellects and the first intellect, i.e., God, according to a threefold bond of dependence: end, form and agent.⁵⁹

On Whether Beatitude Occurs in This Life or After Death According to Averroes

Nifo defends the thesis that the connection between the intellect and the human body allows knowledge of the separate substances: (1) a potency and a natural desire would be idle; (2) after death no intellectual memory survives, thus beatitude is possible only in this life; (3) the rational soul is an adequate perfection which may develop its possible operations, among which happiness; (4) body does not oppose soul; (5) *copulatio* does not oppose the embodied soul (support from biblical stories, Hermes Trismegistus, and Plato); (6) when the inclinations to opposed acts survive, beatitude would be impossible also after death. Thus, the Averroists hold that God may be the form of the intellect, considering the latter both as intellect in the strict sense and insofar as it is connected to the body.⁶⁰ This is the foundation of intuitive knowledge of God in this life:

[Averroes] allowed that the soul could be united to the agent intellect (*copulatio animae cum intellectu agente*), who is God most high. When he says ‘through philosophy,’ he means a positive and privative medium, for philosophy includes a speculative and a practical part. Therefore, taking the intellect as a guide through philosophy, that is, when the soul is united (*copulata*) to the separate intellect through philosophy as if through an intermediary being, the soul reaches the highest level of knowledge (*summe sapuit*), for then it understands (*comprehendet*) God through His essence and the other separate intellects, and the soul, knowing (*apprehendens*) through the divine light, i.e., knowing the abstract divine intellects through their essence, it prophesies to the mortals and shares with them in a generous way the knowledge of them. This is the perfection of the soul.⁶¹

On Which Kind of Copulatio Provides Happiness

Here, the issue is first solved and then explained. The conjunction is a union of pre-existent, discontinuous beings ‘*nec remissis nec intensis*’, and therefore it is not to be confused with generation or mixture. Averroes distinguishes five types of

⁵⁹ Ibid., ch. 39, fol. 60^v.

⁶⁰ Ibid., chs. 40–42, fols 61^v.

⁶¹ Ibid., ch. 45, fol. 62^v. Recall, that Nifo interprets Averroes through the doctrine found in the pseudo-Averroes, *De beatitudine animae*.

conjunction: (1) potential and agent intellects, (2) agent and speculative intellects, (3) potential intellect and the human being, (4) agent intellect and the human being, and (5) imaginative intention with potential intellect. As far as its nature is concerned, the agent intellect is always connected to the possible intellect and thus no medium is required, because the last of the separate intelligences grasps the *abstracta supra se* through the latter's and its own essence. However, insofar as the intellects are connected to us, this *copulatio* is twofold, namely as agent to *passum* (the agent intellect generating known objects that are received in the possible intellect), on the one hand, and as form, when the agent intellect becomes the potential intellect's essential intellection, on the other. Some propositions are derived from these considerations: (1) something (i.e., the agent intellect) may be form and agent with respect to the same substratum; (2) something may be *agens sui* in different forms: the agent intellect generates the speculative intellect which in turn causes the potential intellect's acquisition of the agent intellect as form; (3) the agent intellect is the efficient cause of all known things; (4) it is not the intellection that causes the conjunction, but the other way round.⁶²

Moreover, the conjunction of the agent intellect with the speculative intellect is twofold: (a) the agent intellect creates the latter in the potential intellect, (b) the speculative intellect is a dispositional medium through which the agent intellect becomes the form of the potential intellect. Thus, two propositions can be formulated: (i) the *copulatio* of the agent and speculative intellects precedes that between agent and material intellects; (ii) not the speculative but the material intellect is the 'real matter' of the agent intellect.⁶³ Once the other conjunctions have been expounded, Averroes's ladder to happiness can be presented: apprehension of individual objects, the acquisition of intellectually known objects, and, through the formation of the speculative intellect, the acquisition of the agent and material intellects; happiness has two subjects, one is proximate (potential intellect), the other is remote (the human being).⁶⁴

On Whether Human Beings are Like God in the State of Happiness, As Themistius States

Nifo argues that human beings become like God because they are formed by the superior intellects and because they may know all things. In this sense human beings are like a universe and connect material things to God.⁶⁵

⁶² Ibid., chs. 46–47, fol. 63^r.

⁶³ Ibid., ch. 48, fols 63^v.

⁶⁴ Ibid., chs 49–51, fols 63^v.

⁶⁵ Ibid., ch. 54, fol. 64^r.

On Whether the Agent Intellect is Connected to us Before it is Known by us, or Before we Begin to Understand Through It

The knowledge of the agent intellect precedes its being conjoined, because every new relationship requires a new foundation, which can only be the intellection, as sensation and some unknown disposition are to be excluded. We depend upon the agent intellect as form, end, and efficient cause, and thus we know this intellect through our essence or through its own essence.⁶⁶

On Whether the Intellection of the Happy Human Being is ‘New’ or Eternal

This issue is once again solved with the help of Averroes who argues that the intellection of those who are happy is eternal, and yet, it appears to be ‘new’: (1) it is an operation that denominates a new substratum; (2) it is an operation caused by the agent intellect, and every operation that is caused is something new; (3) if it were eternal, the human being would be eternal too; (4) nothing eternal depends upon something transitory.⁶⁷

On Whether This Intellection is Intuitive or Abstractive

Against Arabic (al-Fārābī, Ibn Bājjā) and Latin (Aquinas, Giles) authors who hold that we cannot grasp the separate substances through intuitive knowledge, Nifo argues that our intellect may know the separate substances through their essences: (1) the object of our intellect is being, and thus nothing of the existing reality can be excluded from its reach; (2) there cannot be any process *in infinitum*; (3) as the senses grasp their object through intuition and abstraction, the intellect cannot be deprived of these capabilities.⁶⁸

On Whether a Master May Communicate it to a Pupil

This issue is easily solved, as every well-prepared pupil (with regard to bodily, vegetative, sensitive and intellectual capabilities) is ready to accept the communication of his master, or of several specialised masters. Nifo also stresses the importance of virtues and internal senses.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid., ch. 55, fol. 64r.

⁶⁷ Ibid., ch. 56, fol. 64v.

⁶⁸ Ibid., ch. 57, fols 64v–65r.

⁶⁹ Ibid., ch. 58, fol. 65r.

On Whether the Human Being is Able to Contact Separate Substances Through Intellecta Falsa

This issue also deserves little discussion. Falsely known objects, that is, false propositions, cannot ground or lead to *continuatio* or *copulatio*, as they are external to the ‘course of nature.’ They are present in the potential, not in the agent intellect.⁷⁰

On Whether Human Beings When They Start to be Happy, Start to Know by Means of the Agent Intellect

The problem of whether initial happiness entails an immediate knowledge of the agent intellect and God is similarly solved in a single chapter. There are two ways in which something can come to be: (1) being disposed to generation (the induction of the form in matter), (2) to start being generated (the form starts being in matter). Our happiness entails knowledge of the agent intellect in the second sense only, since the first type is only a predisposition; eventually, man knows the agent intellect as a form and an end (through its essence), and also as an agent (through our essence).⁷¹

On Whether Separate Substances are Known all Together or in a Certain Order

The solution to this problem offers a fine example of the intricate link between astrology, cosmology and noetics in Nifo’s view of intellectual beatitude. The separate intellects contain the speculative intellect in a certain order (Saturn to Moon), while the speculative intellect contains the intelligences *a posteriori* like an effect contains its cause. Thus, when the potential intellect is joined to God as a form, it is joined to all intermediary intellects, but in a twofold manner, namely regarding their nature as well as their origin. The intermediary intellects mediate in two directions, climbing the ladder less means of knowledge (that is, forms and/or intentions) are involved, and thus one reaches a superior level of conjunction.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid., ch. 59, fol. 65^r.

⁷¹ Ibid., ch. 60, fols 65^v.

⁷² Ibid., ch. 61, fol. 65^v. The ascent of the human intellect through the hierarchy of intelligences which are ordered according to the order of the planets to which they are related is borrowed from Averroes, *De animae beatitudine*; cf. infra.

On Whether Several Humans can be Happy Through One Happiness

The solution of this last issue is based on the distinction between a privative and a positive kind of adequacy, happiness being adequate to all human beings in a positive, not in a privative sense. Accordingly, the same happiness can exist in several persons.⁷³

Only at this point can Nifo expound the foundations of Aristotle's view.⁷⁴ The rational soul, including its vegetative and sensitive capabilities, cannot be divided into a plurality of souls with different 'latitudes.' The rational soul triggers intellectual (prudence, wisdom, wit, memory) and ethical (temperance, liberality, equity, friendship) virtues as well as several passions (fear, hate, love, pleasure), habits and potencies. The latter are faculties that arise from the essence of soul. Passions arise from appetite and the body, while habits are dispositions that arise in sensitive appetite. The rational soul may operate on different levels but never at the same time, since lower levels may disturb higher activities.⁷⁵

Nifo then discusses the perfection of the rational part of the soul according to Aristotle's view. An intelligible can be conceived of in three ways: (1) 'in time', that is accompanied by the perception of time, more or less abstracted from the changing nature of matter; (2) 'in the continuum', i.e., according to Aristotelian categories for analyzing natural reality; and (3) according to its own nature. The first type is two-fold: (i) the ratio of the sensible form in itself, known through abstraction, and (ii) the ratio of sensible objects which concern mobile matter (accidentally in time). The second type is of two kinds, too: (i) *per se*, such as, quantity, shape, number, motion, rest, and (ii) what is conceived by the intellect when it applies to imagination, that is, mathematics (i.e., geometry). Finally, the third type is of two kinds, too: (i) accidentally (quiddities of sensible things) and in itself (God, the intellects). The rational soul develops through knowledge of the intelligibles in time (natural science) and natural reality (imagination) until it reaches the metaphysical intelligibles, when the speculative intellect is formed, and finally by way of knowledge of the separate substances until the first intellect is reached. Who does not acquire beatitude in this life, does not reach it in the afterlife.⁷⁶

⁷³ Nifo, *De intellectu*, VI, ch. 62, fols 65^v–66^r.

⁷⁴ Nifo argues that first another issue needs to be examined, namely the soul's operations and the happiness after death. After having discussed several doubts, he concludes that, given its immortality, it cannot be denied that the soul develops some activity after death. Nifo, *De intellectu*, VI, ch. 63–64. Doubts are solved in ch. 71.

⁷⁵ Nifo, *De intellectu*, VI, ch. 65, fol. 66^v. See *ibid.*, II, ch. 17, fol. 21^v: 'Sed rationalis anima in sui operatione nobilissima, scilicet in speculatione summa primi entis, quae est possibilis ei ac naturalissima, in qua summe quiescit, impeditur a corpore.'

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. 66, fol. 67^v.

The sensitive appetite is ruled by practical syllogisms, from which habits originate. Then appetitive potencies arise from the habits, and when they are perfected, the sensual part is turned into the intellect. The happiness of the sensible part is an operation on the passions according to the instructions of practical reason, so that the conjunction of the intellect with reason is eventually attained. Only then can a series of further *copulationes* become possible: speculative intellect, separate intellects and God. By contrast, the misery or damnation of the human soul after death consists of a complete conversion of reason to sense. The human soul will suffer fire on the basis of the (negative) habits and passions that survive. Thus, misery consists of an everlasting desire in pleasure.⁷⁷

This picture raises new doubts, however: (1) if the acquisition (*adeptio*) of the speculative intellect and moral habits are required for reaching a condition of happiness, then women cannot reach beatitude,⁷⁸ and the same holds for children who die young; (2) what is the destiny of the soul after death? Nifo replies that the first doubt is a problem for Peripatetic philosophy only (women have a minor disposition to be united to the intellect), not for the Christian faith. And as far as newborn children are concerned, happiness after death depends indeed, according to Aristotle, upon the happiness acquired during earthly life. For the solution of the second doubt Aristotle's texts are of little help. Plato, Speusippus and Socrates held that the motors of the orbs are in the stars, rather than in any other part of the orb, and, relying on their views, Nifo argues that the relationship between the soul and the stars is based on the seed of the first intellect, which the stars transmit to the soul. This also explains the transmission of the characteristics of the celestial bodies to individual human beings; thus, after death, every soul returns to its proper star.⁷⁹ And with this rather surprising cosmological perspective Nifo concludes his treatment of human beatitude in *De intellectu*.

In his commentary on Averroes's *De animae beatitudine*, Nifo substantially develops the same ideas, but with some interesting specifications. From the outset, he states that the human soul acquires divine being when in conjunction with the separate substances.⁸⁰ The material intellect knows the agent intellect through the latter's essence, when it becomes the form of the material intellect. Thus, a beatific state is reached characterised by a unity of material and agent intellect and the *res intellecta*. As said before, in this commentary Nifo feels the need to provide some pious clarifications. For example, he states that Averroes argued for a purely natural way to beatitude. Nifo, however, referring to his *De intellectu*, maintains that this state is provided by God on the basis of *meritoriae actiones*.⁸¹ Furthermore, in this

⁷⁷ Ibid., chs. 67–68, fols 67^v–68^r.

⁷⁸ This phrase suggests that at least some Peripatetic philosophers regarded women as intellectually inferior to men.

⁷⁹ Ibid., chs 69–70, fols 68^v. See ibid., I, ch. 14, fol. 8^r: 'Videtur ergo Plato dictum Mosis sic exponere quod Deus substantias omnes spirituales creavit, ut animas, et eas posuit in stellis tanquam semina et exordia animalium humanorum.'

⁸⁰ Agostino Nifo, *In Averrois de animae beatitudine* (Venice: Heirs of Ottaviano Scoto, 1508), fol. 2^v.

⁸¹ Nifo, *In Averrois de animae beatitudine*, fol. 19^v. Probably, Nifo, *De intellectu*, VI, cap. 70, fol. 68^v.

work, he still seems to accept Siger's view of God as the formal object of our beatitude.⁸² In this case too, though, as already happened in *De intellectu*, Nifo argues that humans are able to develop knowledge of God in two ways, i.e., as a form and an end, on the one hand, and as efficient cause, on the other. Two types of knowledge correspond to these two ways, one through the essence of God and another through the essence of the agent intellect, respectively. Indeed, when the whole speculative intellect has been formed, there is no need anymore for a *conversio ad phantasmata*, as the human being understands directly through the essence of the agent intellect.⁸³ Nifo stresses again the central role of the celestial hierarchy of the separate intelligences and God in the realization of human happiness.⁸⁴ Beatitude is the outcome of a progression of the intellect which develops through the habitual and the speculative intellect. Once the latter is fully actualised (*totum et perfectum*), the human being is united *per essentiam* to all separate substances, and this becomes the foundation for an intuitive knowledge of God, that is, a knowledge though *copulatio ut forma*.⁸⁵

Conclusion

Nifo's theory of beatitude is a fine example of a rigorous conceptual analysis in Peripatetic style. It is articulated through a consistent application of the principles of Aristotelian natural philosophy and logics to the realm of (separate) intellects. Nifo shows how progressive apprehension of intelligible knowledge enables the human soul to ascend to God. For example, the assumption that the same intellect, namely the agent intellect, may be linked to us as agent and as form is crucial in Nifo's reasoning. It should be noted that Nifo, like Averroes before him,⁸⁶ attempts to delimitate the physical nature and implications of his categorial framework. Thus, the process of *copulatio* is viewed as a union, and explicitly not as generation or mixture (see, e.g., issue 4). Yet, at first sight the hierarchy of and the several distinctions between intellects appear as rather artificial and unreal, in particular that between potential, speculative and habitual intellect. It should be borne in mind, however, that the habitual and speculative intellects are largely identical and designate a state of the material or possible intellect, while the speculative intellect is seen as a dispositional medium between material and agent intellect. The agent intellect, on the other hand, is not viewed as 'detached' from the possible intellect, and can be reached only in *copulatio*. By contrast, Nifo is well aware that true intellectual growth is based on the intimate link between active and receptive qualities of the human mind. Thus, *intellectio*

⁸² Ibid., fol. 20^{rb}.

⁸³ Ibid., fol. 22^{rb}.

⁸⁴ Ibid., fols 23^{va}–25^{va}.

⁸⁵ Ibid., fol. 25^{va}.

⁸⁶ See Averroes, *Commentarium magnum*, pp. 496–497: the notions of form and matter in the intellectual realm indicate a proportion or disposition.

presupposes *copulatio*, not the other way round. This entails, however, a more or less veiled circularity, not to say a *petitio principii*, in noetic reasoning, since it is tacitly assumed that the final aim of the human intellectual drive is the basis of its very functioning. In a similar vein, the speculative intellect is seen as a product of the activity of the agent intellect with respect to the possible intellect, as well as a dispositional medium or condition for their conjunction.

However, although Nifo's analytical description of the functioning of the Aristotelian mind does not transcend the bounds of its implicit categorial frame, the philosopher after all develops some remarkable positions. In book 6, Nifo argues for an intuitive knowledge of the separate substances and of God, echoing the frequently savaged Jandun and anticipating Spinoza's third kind of knowledge: intuitive knowledge is knowledge through the essence of a thing and guarantees true happiness (*Ethics*, II, propositions 45–47). In Nifo's view, however, beatitude is purely intellectual: the eventual eternal joy which derives from this kind of knowledge is not due to the intervention of the will, and therefore cannot be analysed in terms of a theory of intellectual love. Furthermore, the cognitive union with God is not supernatural, as no medium granted by God is required. The speculative intellect alone suffices as the positive medium for our union with the essence of the agent intellect and thereby with all other separate substances. For Nifo, such a union or *adeptio* is the human being's highest good fortune and it is achievable in this life and by wholly natural means.⁸⁷

In the final chapters Nifo touches upon questions, which also have a more general ethical and theological impact, e.g. the relation between body and soul, that between sense and reason, and that between the embodied soul and the state of soul after death, the position of women and children, and the outlook of misery and happiness. Surprisingly, intellectual *copulatio* does not oppose the embodied soul. Who does not reach beatitude in this terrestrial life, cannot reach it in the afterlife. This view is intimately connected to Nifo's idea, developed in the final chapter of book IV, of the human soul as a 'potestative' whole (*totum quoddam potestativum et essentialie*) which is not split up into distinct faculties (*potestates*).⁸⁸ Only the conversion of sense to reason allows ruling passions and vices, firmly connecting the exercise of practical reason to its *copulatio* with the intellect, and that of the intellect to the separate substances. Thus, a balanced psychological life, based on the cooperation between sensitive drives and intellectual control, guarantees happiness, both practical and theoretical.

⁸⁷ Nifo, *De intellectu*, VI, chs 34, 40, 42, 43–44, fols 59^v–60^r, 61^r, 61^v–62^r.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, ch. 24, fols 48^v–49^r.