

## *Averroes on God's Knowledge of Being Qua Being.*

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Aristotle's claim in *Metaphysics*, XII, ch. 9, that "it must be itself that [divine] thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking (*noêseos noêsis*)"<sup>1</sup> is still puzzling. Averroes' reflections on this particular claim and on the whole issue of God's Knowledge are even more puzzling. Scholars disagree not only about what Averroes' view is but also about how well he handles this difficult theme.

Kogan working mainly on the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (Incoherence of the Incoherence or Destructio destructionis)* concurs with S. Van den Bergh's view that the theory expressed there at first glance "...makes the term 'knowledge' as applied to God not only incomprehensible but meaningless"<sup>2</sup>. Kogan then tries to rescue Averroes by proposing a more subtle interpretation of God's causal knowing but concludes that "when the theory of causal knowing is recognizably epistemic, it is not causal, and when it is causal, it is not epistemic"<sup>3</sup>. As for Jolivet who works on the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, Averroes really departs from Aristotle in his handling of God's thinking<sup>4</sup>. Rosemann, on the other hand, argues that Averroes is a faithful Aristotelian in his commentary on God's thinking about thinking<sup>5</sup>. Finally, Flynn shows how deep is the influence of Averroes on Thomas Aquinas' reflections on God's Knowledge and on which

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<sup>1</sup> 1074b33-35, W. D. Ross' translation in *The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Bollingen Series, LXXI-2). Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 1698.

<sup>2</sup> Barry S. Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation*. Albany, State University of New York Press, 1985, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 246 and "Some reflections on the problem of future contingency in Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes", in *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Tamar Rudavsky. Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1985, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> J. Jolivet, "Divergences entre les métaphysiques d'Ibn Rušd et d'Aristote", *Arabica*, 29 (1982), p. 235.

<sup>5</sup> Philipp W. Rosemann, "Noêsis Noêseos und 'Ta'aqqul at-ta'aqqul'. Das Aristotelische Problem der Selbstbezüglichkeit des Unbewegten Bewegers in der Kommentierung Ibn Rušds", *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, 40 (1986), pp. 543-561.

points Aquinas quotes Averroes either as an authority to be followed or as an adversary to be fought<sup>6</sup>.

These scholars have brought to light many interesting points but have not really focused on the core of Averroes's position on the divine thought and, in particular, on how God may have any Knowledge of the sublunary world. In the four main relevant texts, i.e., the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*)<sup>7</sup>, the *Ḍamīma* (known as the *Appendix*, a brief treatise on God's Knowledge)<sup>8</sup>, the *Faṣl al-Maqāl* (known as *The Decisive Treatise* or *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*)<sup>9</sup>, and the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*<sup>10</sup>, Averroes consistently claims that God's Knowledge is neither particular nor universal. He also asserts that the word "knowledge" is said of God's Knowledge and of ours only equivocally<sup>11</sup>. The equivocality is grounded in the fact that God's Knowledge is the cause of beings whereas beings are the cause of our knowledge<sup>12</sup>. All these negative views are well known but in one passage Averroes offers something positive besides the famous claim that God's

<sup>6</sup> J. G. Flynn, "St. Thomas and Averroes on the Knowledge of God", *Abr-Nahrain*, 18 (1978-79), pp. 19-32.

<sup>7</sup> Arabic edition by Maurice Bouyges, S.J.: Averroes, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (Bibliotheca Arabica Scholasticorum, série arabe, tome III). Beirut, Dar el-Machreq, 1930 [reprinted at the same place in 1987]. English translation by Simon Van den Bergh: *Averroes' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, 2 vol. (E.J.W. Gibb Memorial, N.S. XIX). London, Luzac, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> Arabic text edited by George F. Hourani: Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *Kitāb Faṣl al-Maqāl with its appendix (Ḍamīma) and an extract from Kitāb al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adilla*. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1959, pp. 41-45. English translation by George F. Hourani: Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (E.J.W. Gibb Memorial, N.S. XXI). London, Luzac, 1976, pp. 72-75.

<sup>9</sup> Arabic edition by George F. Hourani: Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *Kitāb Faṣl al-Maqāl*, pp. 3-40. English translation by George F. Hourani, Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, pp. 44-71.

<sup>10</sup> Arabic edition by Maurice Bouyges, S.J.: Averroes, *Tafsīr mā ba'd al-Tabī'at ou "Grand Commentaire" de la 'Métaphysique' d'Aristote*, 3 vol. + notice (Bibliotheca Arabica Scholasticorum, série arabe, tome VII). Beirut, Dar el-Machreq, 1938-52 [reprinted at the same place in 1973] (the Commentary on Bk. XII is in vol. 3 but the pagination is continuous for the 3 vol. of edition). English translation by Charles Généquand: *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics. A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lam* (Islamic Philosophy and Theology: Texts and Studies, 1). Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1984.

<sup>11</sup> *Commentary*, Bouyges, p. 1708 and Généquand, p. 197; *Ḍamīma*, Arabic, pp. 130-31 and English, pp. 74-75; *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Bouyges, p. 462 and Van den Bergh, p. 280. It is because of this equivocality that when speaking of God's Knowledge we are capitalizing Knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> *Commentary*, Bouyges, p. 1708 and Généquand, p. 197; *Ḍamīma*, Arabic, p. 130 and English, p. 74; *Incoherence*, Bouyges, p. 468 and Van den Bergh, p. 285.

Knowledge is causal. *The Commentary* on Bk. XII, section 51, brings a new and very interesting note which will be the focus of my reflections.

"...the First, may He be praised, is the one who knows the nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification (*bi-'iḥlāq* or *simpliciter*) which is Himself [or His essence]"<sup>13</sup>.

This sounds very much as if God's Knowledge is metaphysics and this knowledge is supposed to solve all the puzzles raised by our difficulty to understand God's truly eternal Knowledge of anything outside Himself and especially of what is here below.

Reflecting on this claim and some of its implications I would like to retrace the arguments in order to elucidate the meaning of this statement as well as to determine whether Averroes' final claim in this commentary on *Metaphysics*, Bk. XII, section 51, does indeed resolve all the puzzles. Rosemann claims that it does but he also hints that Averroes' position may be somewhat inconsistent<sup>14</sup>.

First, I shall address the issue of what is meant by the claim that God's Knowledge and ours are equivocal since this general assertion is the underpinning for the view that God's Knowledge is neither universal nor particular. Second, I shall examine what it means to claim that God's Knowledge is neither particular nor universal. Third, I shall discuss some points related to the denial of God's Knowledge of particulars. Fourth, I shall reflect on the denial of God's Knowledge of universals. Finally, I shall examine the claim that God knows being inasmuch as it is being and in this way cannot be said to be

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<sup>13</sup> Bouyges, p. 1708, 11.1-2. As the context helps understanding what is at stake and as the text of the Medieval Latin translation is rather shaky, I am here providing a translation of part of the end of C. 51:

"This is what escaped Themistius when he allowed that the intellect [of the unmoved mover or God] thinks many intelligibles at once. This is contrary to our statement that He thinks Himself and does not think anything outside Himself and that the intellect and what it thinks are one in every respect. For he [Themistius] says that He thinks all things inasmuch as He thinks that He is their principle. All of this is the statement of someone who does not understand Aristotle's demonstrations here. But this entails an objectionable consequence, i.e., that the deity be ignorant of what is here below.

"Therefore, some people said that He knows what is here below by means of universal knowledge and not by means of particular knowledge".

"The truth is that inasmuch as He knows only Himself, He knows the beings through the existence which is the cause of their existences. An example of this is someone who knows only the heat of fire. For it is not said of him that he does not know the nature of the heat existing in hot things. Rather such a person is the one who knows the nature of heat inasmuch as it is heat. In the same way the First, may He be praised, is the one who Knows the nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification which is Himself. For this reason, the name knowledge is said equivocally of His Knowledge, may He be praised, and ours because His Knowledge is the cause of being whereas being is the cause of our knowledge. Hence, His Knowledge, may He be praised, cannot be qualified as universal or particular..." Arabic, pp. 1706-1708.

<sup>14</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 557, n. 41.

ignorant of all things. How is it that such a knowledge is neither universal nor particular? Is Thomas Aquinas who was fascinated by this passage right in his view that such knowledge is no proper knowledge at all?.

### I. THE EQUIVOCITY BETWEEN HUMAN AND DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

In *The Decisive Treatise*<sup>15</sup>, the *Damīma*<sup>16</sup>, the *Tahāfut*<sup>17</sup> and the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, XII<sup>18</sup>, Averroes forcefully asserts that God's Knowledge is very different from ours. In some of these passages the technical expression "equivocal"<sup>19</sup> is used. Flynn<sup>20</sup> claims that there is every reason to believe that Averroes is using the term "equivocal" in the sense of "analogous" or "ambiguous" as it was called by the Arabic philosophers. This would mean that it is not a complete equivocation but simply a "pros hen" one. Rosemann follows suit<sup>21</sup>.

Yet, it seems to me that what is meant is complete equivocity and not a "pros hen" equivocation. Of course, Averroes is very aware of "pros hen" equivocation as his commentary on Bk. IV, ch. 2, in which Aristotle introduces this type of equivocation, shows most clearly. Furthermore, "pros hen" equivocation is explained in the *Tahāfut*<sup>22</sup>. The *Commentary* on Bk. XII itself, in C. 28, speaks of terms used neither homonymously nor equivocally but by being related<sup>23</sup>. Yet, in C. 51 and in every other text I am aware of in which he is speaking of God's Knowledge and ours Averroes uses the term equivocation or equivocal without further qualification which would indicate that only a "pros hen" equivocation is meant.

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<sup>15</sup> Arabic, 10-11; English, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Arabic, 44; English, 74-75.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, Arabic, p. 462; English, p. 280.

<sup>18</sup> Arabic, p. 1708; English, p. 197.

<sup>19</sup> *Commentary*, XII, C. 51, Arabic, *bi-ishṭirāk al-'ism*, 1708; Medieval Latin, *equivoce*, in *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis*, vol. VIII. Venice, Junctas, 1562 [reprint, Frankfurt, Minerva, 1962], f. 337r. The Medieval Latin translation of the end of C. 51 as printed in this edition is rather garbled.

<sup>20</sup> p. 30, n.16.

<sup>21</sup> p. 556, n.38.

<sup>22</sup> Arabic, pp. 387-88; English, pp. 233-34.

<sup>23</sup> Arabic, 1554; English, 133.

Flynn's main text to justify his interpretation of "pros hen" equivocation is located in the *Tahāfut*, discussion VII. This passage tells us that

"...there are things which have a single name not by univocal or equivocal commonality of name but by community of names related to one thing ambiguously. A characteristic of these things is that they lead upwards to a first in that genus which is the first cause for all those things to which this name refers like heat is said of fire and of all other hot things"<sup>24</sup>.

Flynn asserts that this applies to God's Knowledge and ours because one of the illustrations that follows this statement is "the name intellect which according to people is said of the separate intellects according to priority and posteriority since in them a first intellect is cause of the others"<sup>25</sup>. Yet, this text 1. does speak of intellect and not of knowledge; 2. is about separate intellects which do not include the human intellect; and 3. claims that a first intellect is the cause of other intellects whereas Averroes does not claim that God's Knowledge is the cause of our knowledge.

In fact, in all the four texts I am considering, Averroes does not ground the equivocity in a relation of cause and effect between God's Knowledge and ours or/and in a difference of degrees as for instance in fire and hot things. What is the source of the equivocity is that the two knowledges are different kinds of knowledge. God's Knowledge causes beings whereas ours is caused by beings. One could object that the contrast holds of the proximate cause and its effect but that as God's Knowledge is the cause of the very beings which cause our knowledge reference to the remote cause could solve this problem, exactly as fire causes heat in the water boiling on the stove which in its turn will warm the teapot when it is poured in it. Yet, the cases are not similar since in the case of fire and hot things it is always a question of transmitting heat directly or through a certain number of intermediaries, whereas in the case of God's Knowledge and ours the intermediary beings act on the human mind as beings and not as knowing... in fact the intermediary or intermediaries may be a being or beings totally deprived of knowledge such as a tree or a cat.

Averroes always insists on the gap between human and divine Knowledge. The *Tahāfut*, for instance, explains this in striking terms:

"According to the philosophers, it is impossible that His [God's] Knowledge be analogous to our knowledge since our knowledge is caused by the beings whereas His Knowledge is their cause. It is not true that eternal Knowledge is in the image [*'alā sūrat*] of originated knowledge. Anyone who holds the latter position does indeed make of God an eternal human being and of the human being a generable and corruptible God. In sum, as has already been shown what pertains

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<sup>24</sup> Arabic, pp. 387-88.

<sup>25</sup> Arabic, p. 388.

to the First's Knowledge is opposite [muqābil] to what pertains to human knowledge. I mean that it is His Knowledge which produces the beings and that it is not the beings which produce His Knowledge"<sup>26</sup>.

Not only are the two types of knowledge said to be very different, they are even said to be opposite. This opposition is expressed in still stronger terms in *The Decisive treatise*:

"...our knowledge of them [particulars] is an effect of the object known, originated when it comes into existence and changing when it changes; whereas Glorious God's Knowledge of existence is the opposite of this: it is the cause of the object known which is existent being. Thus to suppose the two kinds of knowledge similar to each other is to identify the essences and the properties of opposite things, and that is the extreme of ignorance. And if the name of 'knowledge' is predicated of both originated and eternal knowledge, it is predicated by *sheer equivocity* [*bi-'ishtirāk al-'ism al-mahd*], as many names are predicated of opposite things, e.g. *jalal* of great and small, *sarīm* of light and darkness. Thus there exists no definition embracing both kinds of knowledge at once as the theologians of our time imagine"<sup>27</sup>.

Again the *Damīna* treating of the usual confusion between these two types of knowledge tells us the following:

"The mistake in this matter has arisen simply from making an analogy between the eternal Knowledge and originated knowledge, i.e., between the suprasensible and the sensible; and the falsity of this analogy is well known"<sup>28</sup>.

This refers to *Metaphysics*, X, C. 51, in which Averroes claims that the corruptible and the incorruptible are said equivocally since they are contraries (*mutadādan*) which have nothing in common except the name<sup>29</sup>. He then gives as example the term "body" as used for corruptible and incorruptible beings. The same principle applies to God's eternal and therefore incorruptible Knowledge and ours. Therefore, the complete equivocity between God's Knowledge is causal while ours is caused but also in the equivocity following from the radical

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<sup>26</sup> End of discussion XIII, Arabic, p. 468.

<sup>27</sup> Hourani's translation, p. 54 (the first italics are mine); Arabic, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Hourani's translation, p. 74; Arabic, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Arabic, p. 1387.

difference between the corruptible and the incorruptible<sup>30</sup>. The radical equivocity of knowledge is even transferred to ignorance.

"He is qualified neither by the knowledge which is in us, nor by the ignorance which is its opposite, just as one ascribes none of these two [knowledge and ignorance] to something such that it is not in its nature that any one of them would exist in it"<sup>31</sup>.

Aquinas' paraphrase of this passage in the first book of his *Commentary on the Sentences*, dist. XXXV, qu. 1, art. 3 shows clearly that he understood this equivocity to be complete:

"And from this according to him [Averroes] it does not follow that God is ignorant since His Knowledge is not of the genus of our knowledge and therefore the opposite ignorance does not apply to Him, just as one does not say of a stone that it has sight or is blind"<sup>32</sup>.

This equivocity of ignorance will allow Averroes to avoid saying that, since God's Knowledge is not particular, then God is ignorant of all things. The radical equivocity between divine and human knowledge and ignorance explains why God's Knowledge is neither universal nor particular since these two terms characterize human knowledge.

## II. GOD'S KNOWLEDGE IS NEITHER PARTICULAR NOR UNIVERSAL

The *Decisive Treatise*<sup>33</sup>, the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*<sup>34</sup>, and the *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, XII, C. 51<sup>35</sup>, all assert that God's Knowledge cannot be described as particular or universal. As for the *Damīma*, it claims that

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<sup>30</sup> *Commentary*, X, Arabic, p. 1387.

<sup>31</sup> *Commentary*, XII, C. 51, Arabic, p. 1708.

<sup>32</sup> "Nec ex hoc sequitur, ut ipse dicit, quod sit ignorans: quia scientia sua non est de genere scientiae nostrae: inde nec ignorantia opposita sibi potest convenire; sicut nec de lapide dicitur quod sit videns vel caecus". *Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, ed. by Mandonnet, O.P., vol. 1. Paris, Lethielleux, 1929, p. 817.

<sup>33</sup> Arabic, p. 19; English, p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> Arabic, p. 462; English p. 280.

<sup>35</sup> Arabic, p. 1708; English, p. 197.

eternal Knowledge is "a knowledge of beings which is unqualified"<sup>36</sup>). Hourani interprets this unqualified knowledge of beings as being neither universal nor particular<sup>37</sup>.

The assertion that God's Knowledge is neither particular nor universal is sometimes presented with some variations. For instance, the end of the eleventh discussion in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* formulates it in the following manner:

"In the same way, in what concerns the universals and the particulars, it is true that He [God], may He be praised, knows them and does not know them"<sup>38</sup>.

This formulation which simultaneously both affirms and denies God's Knowledge of universals and particulars is an application of a far reaching previous claim, i.e., that God's Knowledge cannot be divided into the opposites true and false and, therefore, in the case of God two propositions are simultaneously true:

1. God knows what He knows; and
2. God does not know what He knows<sup>39</sup>.

This further claim reinforces the view that God's Knowledge and ours are utterly different.

Another variation on the theme to which Kogan drew attention<sup>40</sup> is found in the sixth discussion of the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. There Averroes tell us that:

"Since for us knowledge of particulars is actual knowledge, we know that His Knowledge resembles more particular knowledge than universal knowledge, even though it is neither universal nor particular"<sup>41</sup>.

The reason given for this surprising further precision reflects a point made again and again, i.e., that God's Knowledge is pure actuality, and reinforces Averroes' attack against Avicenna who had claimed that though God

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<sup>36</sup> Hourani's translation, p. 75; Arabic, p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, p. 118, n. 209.

<sup>38</sup> Arabic, p. 446.

<sup>39</sup> *Tahāfut*, discussion XI, Arabic, 445, but following the correction Van den Bergh adopted in his translation, p. 269, and *cf.* p. 371.

<sup>40</sup> *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation*, p. 230.

<sup>41</sup> Arabic, p. 345.

does not know particulars He does know universals<sup>42</sup>. Curiously enough, this further precision of the general claim is based on some kind of comparison with human knowing and shows that Averroes' view of the complete equivocality between divine and human knowledge is either not fully tenable or gives rise to some inconsistencies at least in the arguments used to make some points. In some cases, Averroes could be sloppy and in other he may want to hide the radicalness of some of his positions.

Beyond the variations on the theme, there are lurking further questions. Is Averroes simply denying that God knows particulars in a particular way universals in a universal way, i.e., is Averroes simply denying human modes of knowing all the beings? Or is Averroes' claim still more radical? Does Averroes assert that God does not know at all both particulars and universals? For instance, the last text we quoted focusses on particular and universal knowledge, qualifying the mode of knowing but without explicitly referring to the objects of knowing themselves. In the same way, the claim that it is both true and false that God knows what He knows could be used to affirm that God both knows and does not know universals and particulars since he would know them but not in a particular or universal mode.

The *Damīma* which focusses on knowledge of particulars seems to make a distinction between the objects known and the mode of their being known.

"... the philosophers have been accused of saying..., that the Glorious One does not know particulars. Their position is not what has been imputed to them; rather they hold that He does not know particulars with originated knowledge..."<sup>43</sup>.

This text seems to affirm that God knows particulars but not in the particular mode of originated knowledge since it is caused by the beings whereas eternal Knowledge causes them.

On the other hand, other passages do not hesitate to deny God's Knowledge of both universals and particulars and not simply the different human modes of knowing them. In the *Commentary on Metaphysics*, XII, C. 51 is particularly enlightening since it denies the particular and universal modes of knowing as well as knowledge of particulars and universals.

"... His Knowledge, may He be praised, cannot be qualified as universal or particular for the one whose knowledge is universal knows only potentially the particulars which are in act"<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> See *Tahafut*, Arabic, p. 347; English, p. 208.

<sup>43</sup> Hourani's translation, p. 75; Arabic, p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Arabic, p. 1078.

And a bit further down the text adds:

"It is even clearer that His Knowledge is not particular since the particulars are infinite and no knowledge encompasses them"<sup>45</sup>

Needless to say, I do think that in fact Averroes denies God's Knowledge of universals and particulars and not simply the particular or universal modes of knowing them. The texts which seem to open the door for knowing particulars in another mode of knowing, such as the passages in the *Damīma* and the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* that we quoted<sup>46</sup> may be considered as popular and as not revealing Averroes' considered view. In other words, they may be trying to hide radical claims rather offensive to religious feelings.

In the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, XII, C. 51, while refuting Themistius' view it clear that God does not think anything outside Himself and this again explains why he claims that God knows neither particulars nor universals.

"This is what escaped Themistius when he allowed that the intellect [of the unmoved mover or God] thinks many intelligibles at once. This is contrary to our statement that He thinks Himself and that the intellect and what it thinks are one in every respect. For he [Themistius] says that He thinks all things inasmuch as He thinks that He is their principle. All of this is the statement of someone who does not understand Aristotle's demonstrations here."<sup>47</sup>

Themistius' suggestion that God knows other things at least inasmuch as He is their principle is rejected by Averroes in the *Tahāfut* as we shall see later<sup>48</sup>.

After this examination of the general assertion that God's Knowledge is of nothing outside Himself and is neither particular nor universal, I would like now to look more carefully at the difficulties raised by each part of this double claim. As Averroes asserts that God's Knowledge is closer to particular knowledge, I shall begin with the denial of knowledge of particulars.

### III. THE DENIAL OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF PARTICULARS

The most straightforward denial of God's Knowledge of particulars is found in a technical work *The Commentary on Metaphysics*, XII, C. 51.

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<sup>45</sup> Arabic, p. 1078.

<sup>46</sup> See, n. 43 and n. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Arabic, pp. 1076-07.

<sup>48</sup> See, nn. 63-64.

"It is even clearer that His [God's] Knowledge is not particular since the particulars are infinite and no knowledge encompasses them".<sup>49</sup>

This statement is altogether peculiar and unique. First, it asserts that the fact that God's Knowledge is not particular is clearer than its not being universal but, on the other hand, Averroes also says that God's Knowledge is closer to particular knowledge. Yet, a greater degree of clarity for an argument denying God's Knowledge of particulars does not preclude that God's mode of knowing whatever He does know would be closer to the particular mode since this mode is actual.

What is more surprising is the reason given for the denial of knowledge of particulars, i.e., that since particulars are infinite they cannot be known. This rests on the utter impossibility for the infinite to be known. To my knowledge, this is the only passage in which Averroes uses this argument. Besides, a passage in the sixth discussion of the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* provide a way to refute it.

"In us apprehension of what is actually infinite is prevented because in us the objects of knowledge are distinct from one another. Yet, if there is a knowledge in which objects of knowledge are unified then with respect to such knowledge the finite and the infinite are equivalent."<sup>50</sup>

The whole problem of course is whether such a unifying knowledge exists and if it does whether this type of knowing would respect the individuality of the particulars and allow us to still speak in a meaningful way of knowledge of particulars. I think that Averroes attempts this through knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being but in saying so I am getting ahead of myself. So lets return to the arguments used to deny to God a knowledge of particulars.

The main arguments against God knowing particulars are that 1. such knowledge is sensory; 2. it would introduce multiplicity in the divine knowing; and 3. it would interfere with the immutability of the divine eternal knowing since particulars are changeable<sup>51</sup>. Two of these three reasons would not apply to a consideration of universals since they are not apprehended by sensation and are not changeable though they are multiple. Averroes is fully aware of this fact but still holds that God cannot know universals either<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Arabic, p. 1078.

<sup>50</sup> Arabic, p. 345.

<sup>51</sup> These three argument can be found in the thirteenth discussion of the *Tahāfut*, Arabic, pp. 460-463; English, pp. 279-281. Arguments two and three can also be found in *The Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, Bk XII, C. 51, particularly, Arabic, pp. 1963-1078; English, pp. 191-98.

<sup>52</sup> *Tahāfut*, Arabic, pp. 461-462; Arabic, p. 280.

#### IV. THE DENIAL OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE OF UNIVERSALS

Averroes often chides Avicenna for contending that God knows universals. His main argument to oppose such view is that knowledge of universals is only potential knowledge of particulars and, therefore, is inconsistent with the claim that God's Knowledge is purely actual.

"His Knowledge, may He be praised, cannot be qualified as universal or particular for the one whose knowledge is universal knows only potentially the particulars which are in act. So his object of knowledge is necessarily potential knowledge since the universal is simply knowledge of the particulars. Since the universal is potential knowledge and there is no potentiality in His Knowledge, may He be praised, then His Knowledge is not universal."<sup>53</sup>

The issue of potentiality is also at the root of the problem raised by the multiplicity of universals as is shown in the sixth discussion of the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*.

"Therefore, one says that the First Knowledge must be actual knowledge and that in it there is no universality at all nor multiplicity arising from potentiality such as the plurality of species arising from the genus."<sup>54</sup>

Let us observe that multiplicity seems to be a derivative of potentiality and that the insistence on the actuality of God's Knowledge has been at the root of the claim though God's Knowledge is not particular yet it resembles more knowledge of particulars than knowledge of universals. Let us also keep in mind that here Averroes denies to God any knowledge of species. We will return to this point later on.

On the other hand, two passages have been brought up which seem to go against the assertion that God does not know the universals and both are found in the *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, XII. The first implies that God knows forms and the other speaks of God's providence for the species.

First, does God know forms? Are they really present in the divine intellect? C. 18, commenting on the end of ch. 3, criticizes Avicenna's "Giver of forms" and theological views about the creation of forms out of nothing. Averroes concludes what he considers as a digression with the following statement:

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<sup>53</sup> *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, XII, Arabic, C. 51, p. 1078.

<sup>54</sup> Arabic, p. 345.

"... it is said that all proportions and forms exist potentially in prime matter and actually in the first mover in a manner similar to the actual existence of the artifact in the soul of the craftsman."<sup>55</sup>

The formula "it is said" may indicate that Averroes is simply reporting some view without agreeing with it. Furthermore, the previous dispute with the theologians centered on their affirmation that God creates forms out of nothing. The view that Averroes reports here rebuts this very claim but is rather suspicious since it focusses on an analogy between the first mover and a craftsman. The whole third discussion in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* is a bitter attack against the validity of this very analogy and already al-Ghazali had perfectly understood that the philosophers were rendering this analogy utterly meaningless. As for Averroes himself, he there states:

"He who tries to compare heavenly with earthly existence, and believes that the Agent of the divine world acts in the way in which an agent in this sublunary world works, is utterly thoughtless, profoundly mistaken, and in complete error."<sup>56</sup>

The second statement which seems incompatible with the claim that God does not know universals is that his providence deals with species but does no concern itself with individuals qua individuals.

"This is the source of God's providence for all beings, i.e., that He protects their species since individual protection is not possible. As for those who think that God's providence concerns itself with each individual what they say is true in some respect but false in another. It is true insofar as no *condition* is found in some individual which is not also found in a class of this species. As for providence for the individual in the way it shares with none other this is something the divine excellence does no require."<sup>57</sup>

Yet, in a previous text, we saw that Averroes specifically denies that God know species<sup>58</sup>. So we have to assume that God exercises providence without knowing it. And He does so since what is really causal is not His Knowledge of beings but their knowledge of Him as final and formal cause. God causes in being an object of knowledge for the separate intellects:

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<sup>55</sup> Arabic, p. 1505.

<sup>56</sup> Van den Bergh's paraphrase, p. 116; Arabic, p. 193.

<sup>57</sup> *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, Arabic, p. 1067. See also, *Tahāfut*, Arabic, p. 504; English, p. 308.

<sup>58</sup> See text of n. 56.

"Therefore, there is nothing to prevent that which is in itself intellect and intelligible from being cause for the various beings insofar as its various aspects are thought."<sup>59</sup>

Of course, Averroes understand that these various aspects are various to us but in God are one and the same:

"Therefore, one must understand from our claim that He is living and that He possesses life is one and the same with regard to the subject but two with regard to the point of view."<sup>60</sup>

So, the different ways in which the beings themselves look at the First, God, and their other causes, if any, determine their forms and species.

**V. GOD IS NOT IGNORANT OF THINGS OF THIS WORLD SINCE HE KNOWS BEING INASMUCH AS IT IS BEING**

As we have seen, on the one hand, Averroes insists that God's Knowing is utterly different from ours and therefore that He does know neither particulars nor universals. On the other hand, he does, not want to claim that God is truly ignorant of the things of this world. His solution is to claim that in knowing Himself God knows the existence which is cause of the beings and, in knowing being inasmuch as it is being, in some way knows the beings.

Refuting the view that God is ignorant of what is here below, C. 51 claims to offer the truth. Let us carefully read this passage:

"The truth is that inasmuch as He knows only Himself, He knows the beings through existence which is the cause of their existences. An example of this is someone who knows only the heat of fire. For it is not said of him that he does not know the nature of the heat existing in hot things. Rather such a person is the one who knows the nature, of being, inasmuch as it is being without qualification (*bi-'iṭlāq*, simpliciter) which is Himself [or His essence]. For this reason, the name knowledge is said equivocally of His Knowledge, may He be praised, and ours..."<sup>61</sup>

The wording is very important. God is *not* ignorant of what is here below but is not said to know it. What He does know is the nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification. He, therefore, is said to know the

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<sup>59</sup> *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, Arabic, p. 1649.

<sup>60</sup> *Long Commentary in the Metaphysics*, Arabic, p. 1620.

<sup>61</sup> *Commentary*, XII, Arabic, 1707-1078; Latin, which is fairly different, *Junctas*, vol. VIII, f. 337 r.

beings through the existence which is their cause. God then does not know the beings but their cause which is His own existence, i.e., Himself. Yet, he does not know that His existence is the cause of anything because God does not even know He is a cause. God cannot know what He is related to nor His own relation to anything else. The *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* says so in the thirteenth discussion:

"The first intellect is pure act and a cause and there is no resemblance between His Knowledge and human knowledge. So insofar as He does not Know something other than Himself qua other He is not passive Knowledge. And insofar as He knows something other inasmuch as it is His own essence He is active Knowledge."<sup>62</sup>

Since God does not know anything else as differing from Himself he cannot know something as caused and therefore He cannot know He is a cause. This application is spelled out in the reply to the second objection in the third discussion.

"The First does not think anything else about His own essence than His very own essence and not anything relating to it, i.e., being a principle."<sup>63</sup>

"His being a principle is a relational aspect and it is not correct that it is exactly the same His essence. If He were to think of His being a principle, He would think that of which He is a principle according to the manner of the existence proper to the latter. And if this were the case the most noble would be perfected by the inferior since the object of thought is the perfection of the thinker."<sup>64</sup>

This text shows not only that God does not know He is a principle or a cause but also that He cannot know this because such knowledge would imply a. that God has knowledge of inferior things; and b. that God's Knowledge is perfected by the object He is thinking and, therefore, would make of His Knowledge a caused knowledge and not a causal one.

All this leads me to conclude that God does not know the beings but rather His owns existence which happens to cause the beings though He does not know there are other beings and therefore does not know Himself as a cause. Now how would such knowledge of the existence which is the cause of the beings ensure that somehow God is not ignorant of the beings he does not know of. The *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, XII, explains this:

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<sup>62</sup> Arabic, p. 462.

<sup>63</sup> Arabic, p. 202.

<sup>64</sup> Arabic, p. 203.

"An example of this is someone who knows only the heat of fire. For it is not said of him that he does not know the nature of the heat existing in hot things. Rather such person is the one who knows the nature of heat inasmuch as it is heat. In the same way, the First, may He be praised, is the one who knows the nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification which is Himself."<sup>65</sup>

Now God is said not only to know the existence which happens to be the cause of the beings though He is unaware of this but also to know the nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification. Just as someone who knows only the heat present in fire cannot be said not to know the nature of the heat present in hot things. But it seems that in this case the one who knows only the heat in fire certainly knows neither hot things nor that there are degrees of heat. The analogy of course comes from *Metaphysics*, II, ch. 1, which for Averroes and the Arabic tradition is the very beginning of the *Metaphysics* since in their text book II comes before what they had of book I. In his commentary on this passage Averroes referring to this analogy simply says:

"Since fire is the cause of heat in things it is the first among all hot things in what concerns the name and meaning of heat."<sup>66</sup>

Notice that the passage in Bk. II indicates that fire is the cause of heat but the passage in Bk. XII does not allude to this but rather shifts to knowing the nature of heat inasmuch as it is heat. Yet, knowing the nature of heat inasmuch as it is heat does not in itself lead to knowing that there are various degrees of heat and that there are other things than fire which exist and are hot.

Using this analogy of the knowledge of heat inasmuch as it is heat Averroes goes back to the Knowledge the First enjoys and states that He is the one who knows the nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification which is Himself. Leaving aside the question whether God's essence can really be equated with the nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification, one can really wonder whether God's knowing the nature of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification and, therefore, being the perfect metaphysician, ensures any real knowledge of things. Furthermore, knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being is given now as the very reason for the equivocity between God's Knowledge and ours. Why is it so? Is it because true knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being is not knowledge of things and we human beings can no more completely put aside knowledge of things when we try to reach knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being than we can put aside

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<sup>65</sup> Arabic, pp. 1707-08.

<sup>66</sup> C. 4, Arabic, p. 14; Latin: Averroes (Ibn Rušd), *In Aristotelis librum II () metaphysicorum commentarius*, ed. by Gion Darms (Thomistische Studien, XI). Freiburg (Switzerland), PaulusVerlag, 1966, 58, l. pp. 26-59, 1.28: "verbi gratia quoniam ignis est causa in rebus calidis, ideo etiam magis est dignus habere hoc nomen calidum et eius intentionem quam omnia alia calida".

knowledge of other things when we try to focus on self-consciousness<sup>67</sup>? Does it mean that human beings cannot really reach knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being? Or does it mean that ordinary human knowledge because it is completely blind to being inasmuch as it is being cannot in anyway be compared to God's but metaphysical knowledge could and, therefore, could be truly called divine knowledge, not only because it has God for one of its objects but also because it imitates God's own very way of knowing? If this is the case, the metaphysician then is more than human.

Yet, leaving aside these fascinating questions I would like to discuss whether God's Knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being without qualification solves Averroes' problems. Knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being is certainly not knowledge of particulars and is not knowledge of universals (plural); yet, it seems to be knowledge of *a* universal, being, but in a very particular mode which therefore transcends the usual meaning of universal. Knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being is not knowledge of the universal "being" in the way such knowledge would become truly actual only by means of knowledge of the particular beings. It focusses on the very universality of the universal. Averroes may have thought that such a mode is neither particular nor universal in the ordinary sense and therefore transcends these divisions as it transcends the ten predicaments.

But can God really know being inasmuch as it is being if He only knows of Himself, a particular being albeit the most perfect and the cause of all other beings, particularly since He does not know Himself as a cause?

Even if one grants such knowledge to God can it really yield some proper knowledge of the beings? Rosemann seems to imply that it does to some extent<sup>68</sup> whereas Thomas Aquinas denies it in the *Commentary on the first book of the Sentences*, didt. XXXV, qu. 1, art. 3. For him it is no proper knowledge at all and he understands Averroes as claiming in the very passage we commented upon the complete equivocity between God's Knowledge and ours.

"However, one must know that the Commentator in *Metaphysics II* (sic, for XII), text 51, says that God does not have knowledge of things other than Himself, except inasmuch as they are beings. For, since His being is the cause of existence for all things, inasmuch as He knows His own being, He is not ignorant of the nature of the *essence* (my underlining) found in all things. In the same way the one who would know the heat of fire, would not be ignorant of the nature of the heat existing in all hot things. Yet, he would not know the nature of this and that hot thing inasmuch as it is this or that. So God by His knowing His own essence, though He knows the existence of all things inasmuch as they are this or that. And from this according to him it does not follow that God is ignorant since His Knowledge is not of the genus of our knowledge and therefore the opposite,

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<sup>67</sup> See, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, XII, C. 51, Arabic, pp. 1700-01; English, p. 194.

<sup>68</sup> pp. 559-561.

ignorance, does not apply to Him, just as one does not say of a stone that it has sight or is blind. But this view is shown to be doubly false. First, because He is not the cause of things only inasmuch as their being in general is concerned but inasmuch as everything that is the thing is concerned."<sup>69</sup>

Another later text of Aquinas, *ST*, prima pars, qu. 14, art. 6, "whether God knows things other than Himself by proper knowledge" deals with the same topic but transforms Averroes' analogy with the person who knows only the heat of fire:

"Some have erred on this point, saying that God knows things other than Himself only in general, that is, only as beings. For as fire, if it knew itself as the principle of heat, would know the nature of heat, and all things else in so far as they are hot; so God, through knowing Himself as the source of being, knows the nature of being, and all other things in so far as they are beings."<sup>70</sup>

After criticizing this view Aquinas concludes:

"We must therefore say that God knows things other than Himself with a proper knowledge, not only in so far as being is common to them, but in so far as one is distinguished from the other."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ed. Mandonnet, pp. 816-17: "Respondeo dicendum, quod Deus certissime proprias naturas rerum cognoscit. Sciendum tamen, quod Commentator in II (sic for XII) *Metaph.*, tex. 51, dicit, quod Deus non habet cognitionem de rebus aliis a se, nisi in quantum sunt entia: quia enim esse suum est causa essendi omnibus rebus, in quantum cognoscit esse suum, non ignorat naturam essentiae inventam in rebus omnibus; sicut que cognosceret calorem ignis, non ignoraret naturam caloris existentis in omnibus calidis: non tamen sciret naturam huius calidi et illius, in quantum est hoc et illud. Ita Deus per hoc quod cognoscit essentiam suam, quamvis cognoscat esse omnium rerum in quantum sunt entia, non tamen cognoscit res in quantum est haec et illa. Nec ex hoc sequitur, ut ipse dicit, quod sit ignorans: quia scientia sua non est de genere scientiae nostrae: inde nec ignorantia opposita sibi potest convenire; sicut nec de lapide dicitur quid sit videns vel caecus. Sed haec positio dupliciter apparet falsa: primo, quia ipse non est causa rerum quantum ad esse ipsorum solum commune, sed quantum ad omne illud quod in re est." (Thomas rephrasing at times is closer to the Arabic than the Junctas text but the analogy with the stone seems to be his own creation).

<sup>70</sup> Pegis' translation, in *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, New York, The Modern Library, 1948, p. 137. Latin, Marietti's edition, 1928: "... circa hoc quidam erraverunt, dicentes quod Deus alia a se non cognoscit nisi in communi, scilicet in quantum sunt entia. Sicut enim ignis, si cognosceret seipsum, ut est principium caloris, cognoscere naturam caloris, et omnia alia, in quantum sunt calida; ita Deus, in quantum cognoscit se ut principium essendi, cognoscit naturam entis, et omnia alia, in quantum sunt entia."

<sup>71</sup> Pegis' translation, p. 137. Latin: "Oportet igitur dicere quod alia a se cognoscat propria cognitione; non solum secundum quod communicant in ratione entis, sed secundum quod unum ab alio distinguitur".

Though here Aquinas makes the parallel with fire more complete by the *per impossibile* hypothesis that fire could know itself as the principle of heat and therefore assumes that God can know Himself as the source or principle of the beings which Averroes denies, he still claims that a knowledge of common being is no proper knowledge. Such knowledge Aquinas considers a universal knowledge, yet Averroes who speaks of the nature of being inasmuch as it is being -which Aquinas does not here directly address- seems to think such knowledge is not really universal but transcends the division between universal and particular and, therefore, does not involve any potentiality. Knowledge of being inasmuch as it is being is somehow also actual knowledge of the cause of all the beings and of the actual being of the caused beings, at least if God were aware of them... This seems a clever but rather unsatisfactory answer to the problems raised by God's Knowledge of anything outside Himself. Even if God is a metaphysician and, therefore, metaphysics is the divine way of knowing it still does not ensure true knowledge of things here below.