

KATJA KRAUSE, RICHARD TAYLOR (EDS.), *ALBERT THE GREAT AND HIS ARABIC SOURCES. MEDIEVAL SCIENCE BETWEEN INHERITANCE AND EMERGENCE*, BREPOLS, TURNHOUT 2024 (PHILOSOPHY IN THE ABRAHAMIC TRADITIONS OF THE MIDDLE AGES, 5), 473 PP., ISBN: 9782503609379.

JOSPEP PUIG MONTADA
UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID



Collective volumes gathering contributions from scholars who work in the same field are common. They overcome the limitations of individual work and enrich our perspective, although sometimes they are not sufficiently interconnected. The volume under review focuses on Albert the Great and his Arabic sources, so it is a real challenge to put together articles on the subject that give an accurate picture. In this regard, we can say in advance that Arabic philosophy was as important to Albert as the Greek tradition. What is more, this collective volume deals with complex issues not only in the Latin context but also in the Arabic origins of texts and doctrines. In accord with the request of the editors of this journal, in what follows I will provide a descriptive account of this work to which I am myself also a contributor.

Katja Krause and Richard Taylor, the editors of the volume, open with an essay on the intrinsic value of philosophy for Albert. They stress that Albert sought a philosophical *scientia* « in service of the human scientist who studies it » (reviewed book, p. 15). Theology was the other *scientia* and its goal is eternal, the union with God, where everything is studied « under the aspect of this final causality of the beatifying end » (p. 18). The book is devoted to his philosophical *scientia* as Krause and Taylor explain:

Our book is framed by two contributions by Jorge Uscatescu Barrón and David Twetten – that bracket the whole range of Albert's scholarly activity from the nascent stage of his *scientia*, in *De natura boni*, to the matured and fully independent development of the two *scientiae* of philosophy and theology, in *De causis* and *Summa theologiae* respectively (p. 24).

Twelve chapters contribute to the effort of describing the development of the philosophical *scientia*. The initial chapter deals with the concept of the good, which plays a pivotal role in Albert, as Uscatescu, Anzulewicz, and other scholars have

pointed out. In his chapter,¹ Uscatescu goes through Albert's treatises *De bono* (1236–37) and *Summa theologiae* (1280), as well as *Super Dionysium De divinibus nominibus* (1248–50). Albert gives several definitions of the good, and Uscatescu shows how he accepts Avicenna's definition of the good as the actuality of potentiality, and how he enhances the formula developed by Philip the Chancellor, who had also benefited from Avicenna's distinctions. That Albert ultimately adopts a definition nested in the Aristotelian tradition in which form is preponderant does not overshadow the importance of Avicenna in the process leading to this doctrine and Uscatescu is right to keep the balance between the two of them.

The good is one of Albert's four transcendentals – *ens, unum, verum, bonum* –, and Amos Bertolacci complements their study with his chapter on 'One' and 'Existent'.² Bertolacci notes that there is need for an updated enquiry on Albert's role in the transmission of the doctrine from Arabic into Latin and he aims at fulfilling this need. He pays tribute to the pioneering work of Alain de Libera on the reception of Avicenna's doctrine of the transcendental unity, and among the texts analysed by De Libera, he mentions the passage of Albert's commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IV to which Bertolacci devotes his chapter. He first analyses Averroes' criticism of Avicenna, and I would like to quote his translation of an often-quoted paragraph of Averroes' Long Commentary: « Ibn Sīnā made a great mistake in this regard, since he believed that 'one' and 'existent' signified attributes that are added to the thing's essence » (p. 342); as required, Bertolacci accompanies his translations with relevant passages from Avicenna's *Al-Shifā'*, his philosophical encyclopedia. In a painstaking examination, he dismantles Averroes' interpretation and makes the case for Avicenna's awareness that 'existent' and 'one' « are not only associated with different concepts, but also predicated in different ways » (p. 352). As for Albert's reception, or 'inheritance', Bertolacci reproduces the Latin text of Albert's digression, *In Metaphysicam*, IV.1.5, and he contrasts it with the Latin translation of some fragments of the above-mentioned Long Commentary by Averroes, of Avicenna's Latin *Al-Shifā'*s, and of the *Liber de causis*.³ The selected texts lay the groundwork for his defense of Albert who strives for the harmonization of both, Avicenna and Averroes.

As I indicate in my own contribution, two major themes permeate the writings of medieval Christian, Jewish and Muslim thinkers, namely, the essence of the intellect and the creation of the world. The enquiry on the latter revolves around

¹ Chapter 2: « Albert the Great's Definition of the Good ».

² Chapter 12: « Inheritance and Emergence of Transcendentals ».

³ The *Liber de causis* is the Latin translation of a 12th-century Arabic text that was composed in Baghdad in the 9th century by the circle of Al-Kindī, mainly from the Arabic translations of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*.

the eternal character of motion,⁴ and has consequences for the eternity of the world. Albert was very definite that God and motion are not 'coeternal' (p. 148). And Averroes is very present in the discussion of both questions, as Richard Taylor proves in his chapter.⁵

Taylor masterfully summarizes the three main stages of Averroes' doctrine on the Material and Agent Intellect. Averroes always considered the agent intellect to be transcendent, but he first considered the material intellect to be a power of imagination in each individual human being. The final stage, represented by the *Long Commentary on the Soul*, shows us an elaborate discussion of how the two transcendent intellects cooperate in order for the human being to acquire knowledge of the intelligibles, a stage in which Averroes follows Themistius in declaring that « human beings are made like unto God » when they go through this process (*assimilatur Deo*, p. 82).

The issue of the life after death is inseparably connected with the former issue of the Material and Agent Intellect. Taylor turns to the *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* and presents several passages concordant with the doctrine expounded in the *Long Commentary on the Soul*: human happiness is attained through the conjunction of the human being with the Agent Intellect and the Material Intellect: it is pure intellectual activity. However, Taylor points out that « such happiness takes place only during short earthly lives » (p. 89) as he claims that for Averroes there is no proof for individual afterlife.

Averroes' works reached the Latin world as early as 1225 and this time limit would apply validity to the two Long Commentaries mentioned; his earlier views in his Short and Middle Commentaries remained unknown. However, Avicenna's views on the transcendent Agent Intellect were known and subject to debate. Taylor agrees with B. Bazan that the view that the Agent Intellect is a power that must be in each individual was an original contribution of the Latin theologians (p. 96). The reviewed book deals with Albert the Great and Taylor leads us to the connection. He argues that Albert's *De homine* incorrectly attributes to Averroes the doctrine that the Agent Intellect as well as the Material Intellect are inherent in man and adopts it for himself. Later, however, he realizes the mistake and his commentary *Super Ethica* bases its criticism on the reading of Averroes' Long Commentaries and, as Taylor claims, the translation of the Arabic *bi-ākhirat*ⁱⁿ (afterwards, after all) as *in postremo* led Albert to consider misconstruing the meaning as 'in the afterlife' which means that there is an afterlife in which *one soul* endures thanks to the conjunction of both intellects, that is, Albert reads Averroes as a defender of monopsychism. Consequently, the complexities of the texts of Averroes and their interpretations must be taken into account when confronting

⁴ Chapter 5: « Albert and 'the Arabs'. On the Eternity of Motion ».

⁵ Chapter 3: « Albert the Great and Two Momentous Interpretive Accounts of Averroes ».

Albert's doctrine of the soul since they are essential elements of his own development.

The *Super Ethica* (1252), Albert's commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, also takes into account Averroes' Middle Commentary on the same text. The harmony of faith and reason is sustained by Averroes, who never admitted that Aristotle's teachings could breach those of Islamic Divine Law. Martin J. Tracey shows that Albert was not so convinced and gives four instances, the first of which is related to Averroes.⁶ Tracey writes: « In *Super Ethica* I.13, Albert states that nothing can be demonstrated contrary to what is determined by faith » (p. 121), and this tenet is close to Averroes' hermeneutic solution to any apparent conflict between the Koran and philosophy. Surprisingly, Albert's understanding of Averroes is highly problematic, since he attributes to him the doctrine that only a universal soul survives after death (p. 123, n. 25), which he considers heretical; yet we have read above that Taylor states that Albert did not believe this when he wrote the *De homine* around 1242 but in his later writings. Although both share the belief that reason is not opposed to faith, Albert ignores this and accuses Averroes of being a heretic, while rescuing Aristotle. Nevertheless, Albert knows that there are places where Aristotle and faith cannot be reconciled, and Tracey sees there « a source of inspiration for the doctrine of the twofold truth » (p. 139), and so we are introduced to Latin Averroism!

Intellectual knowledge was an object of study and discussion in several works of Albert the Great, Luis X. Lopez Farjeat reminds us.⁷ Farjeat looks at his *De Anima* where Albert presents Avempace's view of the conjunction of the material intellect with separate substances and Farjeat shows that Albert relies on Averroes for his account of Avempace. As for Avicenna and Al-Ghazzali, Farjeat explains that Albert read Avicenna, and saw him as an authority, with whom he sometimes agreed and sometimes did not. Albert rejected Avicenna's view of the agent intellect as the emanator of the intelligible forms, although Farjeat remarks that Avicenna also has a doctrine of abstraction, and that the agent intellect intervenes in the process of abstraction. Albert elaborates his own doctrine of intellectual knowledge and Farjeat shows that Averroes is his referent: his doctrine can only be understood in his dialogue with 'the Arabs' and in particular with him.

Memory and knowledge are closely linked to each other, and Jörn Müller enquires about the possibility of an intellectual memory in the individual soul.⁸ Memory plays an essential role in Augustine, since memory, intellectual

⁶ Chapter 4: « Albert's Invocations of Averroes in his Account in *Super Ethica* of the Relation between Philosophical and Theological Ethics ».

⁷ Chapter 8: « Albert the Great's Use of Averroes in his Digressions on Human Intellectual Knowledge (*De anima* III.3.8-11) ».

⁸ Chapter 9: « Is there an Intellectual Memory in the Individual Human Soul? Albert the Great between Avicenna and Aquinas ».

knowledge and will are the mirror image of the Holy Trinity in the human nature, and Albert was familiar with Augustine's doctrine. On the other hand, Aristotle considered memory as a so-called 'internal sense' and Avicenna strengthened the sensitive dimension of memory, rejecting an intellectual memory in man « in which intelligible species are stored » (p. 254). Aquinas did not follow in Avicenna's footsteps, and one of the reasons for turning away from him was theological, since Aquinas needed the separated soul to be endowed with intellectual memory as one source of knowledge in the individual afterlife. Müller observes that Albert walks a difficult line of balance between Avicenna and Aquinas, he says graphically that Albert « sits on the fence » (p. 263). In Book III of his commentary on *De Anima*, Albert expresses the view that the *intellectus adeptus*, the acquired intellect in Arabic epistemology, requires intellectual memory to ensure its sustenance. Müller offers us a fresh, challenging exposition of Albert in relation to his famous disciple.

Henryk Anzulewicz, the renowned editor of several volumes of Albert's works, looks at another aspect of his epistemology, the role of the will in cognitive processes, although his main objective in the chapter⁹ is « to present certain aspects of Albert the Great's view regarding the natural prerequisites of human scientific aptitude » (p. 284). Anzulewicz studies his *Metaphysica*, *De anima* and *De homine*, as well as naturalist writings such as his *Quaestiones super De animalibus*, or *De natura loci*. That all human beings naturally desire to know is an Aristotelian saying that Albert also subscribes to, but he observes that people have varying degrees of desire, and that some have none at all. Anzulewicz shows how Albert searches for internal and external conditions that explain the differences between people, and how Avicenna is also an authority that he considers in his search.

As a naturalist, Albert does indeed have an extraordinary dimension. In his work *On Vegetables and Plants* we find their systematic classification, accurate and innovative, but the contribution of Arabic science is present too in this and other writings. Irvén M. Resnick¹⁰ writes that Avicenna was the Arab philosopher whom Albert « most admired and most often cited » (p. 168) and who shaped his natural thinking. Resnick mentions Avicenna as being decisively influential on Albert's defense of celestial causes for a universal flood (p. 175). Resnick observes that Avicenna and Averroes disagree on important topics and attempts to reconcile them. The hypothesis of a universal flood destroying all kinds of animals is raised by Albert, who sees that Avicenna sustains that their spontaneous regeneration can be produced by celestial causes, while Averroes restricts the possibility to some species of simple animals. Resnick shows that Albert follows Averroes: he admits the spontaneous regeneration of so-called imperfect animals « like the

⁹ Chapter 10: « What Makes a Genius? Albert the Great on the Roots of Scientific Aptitude ».

¹⁰ Chapter 6: « Albert the Great's Treatment of Avicenna and Averroes on a Universal Flood and the Regeneration of Species ».

mice and the bat » and excludes the regeneration of the perfect animals « like the lion, the ox and the human » (p 184). In any case, Avicenna and Averroes are taken very seriously as sources by Albert.

The natural world is the world of generation and corruption, i.e., of material substances that come to be and pass away. Adam Takahashi analyses the Aristotelian doctrine of substantial change found in the treatise *On Generation and Destruction*,¹¹ and draws our attention to GC II.1-4 where Aristotle explains how « the so-called elements of the bodies are composed and how they transmute into each other ». The elements are four: earth, water, air, and fire; they distinguish from each other because of a combination of two primary qualities: hot/cold, dry/moist, which determines their essence (*ousia*).

Aristotle did not specify how hylomorphism applies here, but both Avicenna and Averroes addressed the issue. Avicenna did not admit that the primary qualities are the substantial form of the element. On the contrary, and according to Takahashi, « Averroes regards the combination of the primary qualities of an element, to be the form of that element » (p. 203). Albert wrote a commentary on *De Generatione et Corruptione* and he took his own stand on this and other issues. His view comes closer to that of Avicenna, although he was not able to read his treatise on the subject, and Takahashi writes that « Albert rejects the reduction of the formal cause of the elements to their primary qualities » (p. 209). There are other cases, such as that of spontaneous generation, where Albert quotes Averroes and decides whether to accept his view or not, always respecting his authority.

Katja Krause also studies the natural philosophy of Albert the Great, focusing on the epistemic dimension.¹² She chooses two cases: pain and teeth, and taste and flavor, to show that Albert had his own epistemic concerns, so that he « mined » the Arabic sources that served his concerns, and that he was not interested in the concerns that their authors actually had. We know that Albert incorporated large parts of Avicenna's medical *Canon* into his anatomy and physiology of the human body. Avicenna, in turn, had extensively incorporated texts from Galen, who stated that the teeth were the only bones that had sensation, adding – in this case – that Galen had established it by *experimentum*. According to Krause, Albert « transhistorizes » the evidence and « privileges the evidentiary value of experience over its authoritative value » (p. 315). Therefore, the epistemic dimension that she studies reveals that Albert intended to gain a universal truth, when he explained sensation in the teeth.

The book under review begins with two chapters on ontology, the discipline newly established by Avicenna, and ends with a chapter on the doctrine of

¹¹ Chapter 7: « Against Averroes' Naturalism. The Generation of Material Substances in Albert the Great's *De generatione et corruptione*, and *Meteorologica* IV ».

¹² Chapter 11: « Source Mining. Arabic Natural Philosophy and *experiential* in Albert the Great's Scientific Practices ».

emanation in Albert the Great, which also has deep roots in Avicenna; the chapter could easily be a monograph, since David Twetten has undertaken a long and detailed investigation that should be the subject of an independent review.

The *Liber de causis*, i.e., the Latin translation of the *Kitāb al-Idāh fī al-Khayr al-Mahd*, gave the Latin philosophers a distorted image of Aristotle, who was transformed into a Neoplatonist. His explanation of the universe was « complete » with an emanationist account. Many difficulties plagued the account, and the most serious concerned the conflict with the Christian doctrine that God created the world in an act of free will. Albert the Great wrote a commentary on the *Liber de causis* and developed his own scheme of emanation aimed at preserving God's freedom. Twetten analyses the development of Albert's doctrine and obviously quotes texts from his writings to support his analysis. Among them I would mention this passage from his *Physica*, where we can read: « We say, however, that [the heavens] flow absolutely from the First Cause according to the choice of His will » (p. 377). Twetten argues that Albert is successful in his endeavor, but we should leave it to the reader, or to a more comprehensive review, to decide about that.

Despite the diversity of subjects and categories – ontology, epistemology, natural sciences – as well as the stages of Albert the Great's intellectual development, the collective volume succeeds in providing a comprehensive approach to his philosophy. More importantly, the book maintains a unity not only in the inclusion of Arabic philosophy, but also in the appreciation of its influence on Albert's philosophy.