

Averroes Latinus on Memory. An Aristotelian Approach¹

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I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In recent years Averroes' theory of memory, as it is set forth in the epitome commentary on Aristotle's *Parva naturalia*, has been the subject of two careful investigations: Janet Coleman's interpretation, focusing particularly on Averroes as the background of the Latin medieval theories, and Deborah Black's discussion, taking its point of departure from the Arabic text and from Averroes' philosophy in general.² Other studies, in particular those concerned with the so-called "internal senses", of which memory is one, have touched upon the definition of memory in Averroes, but only Coleman and Black have made memory their primary object of concern.³

In this article I analyse Averroes' theory of memory from a third perspective, *viz.* as an interpretation of Aristotle, in order to establish more clearly what kind of Peripatetic background the Latin thinkers must have had as the foundation of their own theories. That is, the Averroes that I want to examine is *Averroes Latinus, Commentator*. Thus, when I say "Averroes", what I actually mean is "Averroes in the Latin translation",⁴ which is not, of course, completely the same thing as the historical Averroes. As a natural consequence, I do not examine what

¹ I am grateful to Sten Ebbesen for comments and suggestions.

² Coleman (1992) 401-15; Black (1996).

³ For bibliography, cf. Black (1996) 161n1, 162n2.

⁴ For the Latin text, cf. Averroes, *Compendia librorum Aristotelis qui Parva naturalia vocantur*, ed. A. L. Shields, adiuvante H. Blumberg, Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge, Mass. 1949. In the following, I cite the *versio vulgata* of Shields' edition (as *Compendium de memoria*), but I have standardised the orthography, and I have sometimes altered the punctuation of the edition. The Arabic text is found in Averroes, *Epitome of the "Parva naturalia"*, ed. H. Blumberg, Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge, Mass. 1972.

motivated Averroes' theory. Therefore, this article links up most naturally with Coleman's discussion, although my reconstruction differs from hers in important respects. In fact, in many ways my work results from the stimulation provided by her interpretation of Averroes. Naturally, I also refer to Black's reconstruction of Averroes' theory, but my purpose is somewhat different from hers.

II. THE BACKGROUND: ARISTOTLE'S THEORY

According to the Latin translation of Avicenna's *Liber de anima*, well-known to the West from the late 12th century, memory is an internal sense and its objects are "intentions" (Lat. *intentiones*). He further characterised memory as the storing place, or treasure house, of intentions. Both intentions and internal senses were to become immensely important in the Latin West.⁵ However, neither intentions nor internal senses were concepts used by Aristotle. He himself never refers to any perception of intentions, and he never talks about any internal *senses*. In fact, as regards memory, Aristotle explicitly says that it is not a sensing/perceiving faculty.⁶ It is a full-fledged faculty or ability in human beings and in a number of other animals, and, even though it is dependent on sense perception, it must be categorised in a separate class. The primary distinguishing feature is that memory always refers to the past (whereas sensation and perception always refer to the present), and therefore Aristotle devoted a small treatise, the *De memoria*, to two concepts which, although very different from each other, both possess this feature of referring to the past: memory (*μνήμη*) and recollection (*ἀνάμνησις*). In this treatise, he analysed memory and defined it as a very narrow concept, saying that memory is the state of having an internal image present and viewing it as a representation of something of the past.⁷ That is, when one remembers, one views an internal image with the

⁵ Cf. in particular Avicenna, *Liber de anima* I.4-5, IV.1-3, ed. S. van Riet, Louvain-Leiden 1968-1972. See also the conclusion below.

⁶ Aristotle, *De memoria* 1, 449b24-5.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, 449b24-5; 1, 450b18-451a17.

additional information that the image represents something from the past. The images found in different internal states — memory, imagination and dreams — are ontologically identical; the difference lies in the *modus spectandi* that is present in the viewer. And this is all there is to memory. Retention and the use of will in a process of recalling something are *not* kinds of remembering, according to Aristotle, but belong to different capacities of animals and human beings.

Thus, it is fair to say that Aristotle's theory of memory is a very narrow one, and furthermore recollection is distinguished from memory as a completely different sort of capacity. They are not only treated in separate chapters,⁸ but they are also different in kind; for whereas memory is analysed as a rather passive state in the sensing soul, recollection is defined as an active process in the thinking soul.

Averroes agrees that thought is involved only in recollection, but he describes both memory and recollection as processes.⁹

As regards internal senses and intentions, which were, in fact, conceptual innovations, Aristotle's *De anima* was held by Averroes to have established the existence of internal senses,¹⁰ and at least some Arabic intentions were among the common sensibles of the original Aristotelian theory.¹¹ Still, Aristotle's theories of memory and recollection and Avicenna's theories of internal senses and intentions were not easily compatible, and Averroes was faced with two major problems: (1) applying the Avicennian conceptual apparatus to an

⁸ Averroes does not make an equally rigid separation of memory (remembrance) and recollection (search through remembrance) into different chapters but treats them both throughout the entire epitome.

⁹ It must, however, be admitted that Aristotle's theory of memory is much disputed. For discussion and references to the relevant literature, cf. R. Sorabji (2004²); King (2004); Bloch (2006).

¹⁰ In Avicenna, the *sensus communis* and *fantasia* became one and the same faculty, but Aristotle's own φαντασία was analysed as a concept that contained several internal senses. Cf. Black (1996) 164.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. Avicenna, *Liber de anima* II.2, ed. S. van Riet, vol. 1, p. 118 (figure characterised as an intention); Aristotle, *De anima* II.6 & III.1 (figure among the common sensibles).

interpretation of Aristotle, and (2) establishing a viable notion of memory, since both Aristotle's and Avicenna's theories are too narrow.

I will argue that the Latin version of Averroes' interpretation that the West inherited is not strictly speaking an interpretation of the Aristotelian text, even though it is certainly of Peripatetic nature. Thus, only in a very general sense did the Latin Averroes take over Aristotle's framework, and he used a revised version of the Avicennian conceptual apparatus and expanded on the Aristotelian theory without much regard for the wording of Aristotle's *De memoria*.¹²

III. AVERROES' DEFINITION OF MEMORY

The first distinction that Averroes makes in the epitome corresponds to the Aristotelian distinction between memory and recollection set forth at the beginning of the *De memoria*.¹³ Thus, such a distinction is found also in the Arabic philosophers,¹⁴ but there is a substantial difference between Aristotle's and Averroes' treatment. Averroes' text reads:

This treatise goes on to study remembrance and search through remembrance ...¹⁵

The important term is "remembrance" (*rememoratio*). For in the Latin translation Averroes uses the term in the basic descriptions of both Aristotelian concepts: memory and recollection.¹⁶ It might seem, therefore, that these two faculties cannot be distinguished with the strictness found in Aristotle, and even though this is partly the result of an unfortunate translation, the treatise as a whole does in fact soften the

¹² I disregard here the fact that the Arab Averroes' *De memoria* text may well have looked very different from ours. On the problem of the *Parva naturalia* in the Arab tradition, cf. H. Gätje (1971) 81-92; S. Pines (1974); Black (1996) 177n54.

¹³ Aristotle, *De memoria* 1, 449b4-6.

¹⁴ For Avicenna, cf. Avicenna, *Liber de anima* IV.3, ed. S. van Riet, vol. 2, pp. 40-1.

¹⁵ Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, p. 47: "Iste tractatus incipit perscrutari de rememoratione et inquisitione per rememorationem ..."

¹⁶ Not so, however, in the Arabic text, where *rememoratio* renders *al-dhikr*, and *investigare per rememorationem* renders *al-tadhakkur*. Cf. Black (1996) 162-3n5.

differences between the two concepts. Anyhow, this does not contribute to clarity in Averroes' interpretation, and, as I shall argue, it has misled at least one modern interpreter.

Averroes juxtaposes and analyses the concepts of "remembrance" and "search through remembrance" several times in the epitome. The first, and basic, analysis of the two terms is as follows:

For remembrance is the return in the present of an intention apprehended in the past. But search through remembrance is a search for this intention through the will and making it present after a period of absence.¹⁷

A similar analysis, proposed a little later, uses "cognition" (*cognitio*) instead of "return", and specifies that a period without direct cognition must occur before remembrance can take place, but does not otherwise add to the first.¹⁸

These descriptions could perhaps be construed so as to fit the original Aristotelian concepts of memory and recollection, except for the basic Averroean feature (in accordance with Avicenna) that intentions are the objects of this faculty. Thus, the present cognition of a past object might sound completely in line with Aristotle's theory, as set forth in *De memoria* 1. However, it is clear from other passages that Averroes is not satisfied with a static concept of memory. In a third description he says:

¹⁷ Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, p. 48: "Rememoratio enim est reversio in praesenti intentionis comprehensae in praeterito. Investigatio autem per rememorationem est inquisitio istius intentionis per voluntatem et facere eam praesentari post absentiam."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49: "Rememoratio igitur est cognitio eius quod fuit cognitum, postquam cognitio eius fuit abscisa. Investigare autem per rememorationem est acquisitio cognitionis, et laborare et facere cogitativam laborantem in repraesentatione illius cognitionis."

And the object of remembrance is a form that can easily be reintroduced, while the objects of a rememorative search are forms that are difficult to reintroduce.¹⁹

And Averroes then goes on to describe the easily reintroduced forms as those of much "corporality" (*corporalitas*) and little "spirituality" (*spiritualitas*), while forms that are difficult to reintroduce are those with little "corporality" and much "spirituality".

This last description, apparently, makes it only a matter of degree, whether or not a particular process is "remembrance" or "a search through remembrance", and this is a problem, if the description is conceived as an interpretation of Aristotle.²⁰ And it is also noteworthy that Averroes is apparently analysing remembrance as a process, not just as a cognitive state.²¹ Thus, the "return" (*reversio*) and "cognition" (*cognitio*) descriptions that were found in the first two descriptions both seem to be focused on the end result, that is, the resultant cognitive state of having some past object internally present. But the third description seems to indicate a process. As I will show, Averroes certainly thinks that a rememorative process exists.

Averroes, then, considerably weakens the boundaries between memory and recollection. And furthermore, he has also introduced a concept of memory, or remembrance, which is broader than the Aristotelian concept, including both cognition of the internal object and the process of bringing the object forward to one's attention.²² And

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66: "Et rememoratio est formae facilis reductionis; investigatio autem rememorativa est formarum difficilis reductionis." Cf. also the similar definition *ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁰ It is notable that Albertus Magnus, *Liber de memoria*, ed. P. Jammy, vol. 5, 1651, p. 57a, uses this particular lack of distinguishing in favour of the claim that recollection does not belong to the rational soul, which is a claim that must, I think, be considered contrary to Aristotle's theory, although most Latin schoolmen after Albert believed it to be true also of the Aristotelian theory.

²¹ Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 64-5, where remembrance is described as a movement (*motus*).

²² It is also broader than the Avicennian concept, which merely refers to a storing place in his general definition. Cf. Black (1996) 164, but see also the conclusion below.

Averroes proceeds to make it even broader. Thus, he introduces two more concepts related to memory: “the activity of the rememorative faculty” (*actio virtutis rememorativae*), which is another way of describing the process of remembrance, and “preservation” (*conservatio*).

The phrase “activity of the rememorative faculty” is ambiguously introduced in the epitome. Having just analysed both “remembrance” and “search through remembrance”, Averroes says that “this activity belongs to the faculty that is called rememorative”,²³ and it is not immediately clear whether it refers to remembrance in general or to “search through remembrance” in particular. However, from the following passage it seems that “remembrance” is used synonymously with “activity of the rememorative faculty”, and furthermore the process later described as the activity can be performed both by human beings and animals. Thus, it cannot be solely the “search through remembrance” that is referred to by the activity.

So, the process of remembrance is the activity of the rememorative faculty. This process is described and analysed as containing four elements:²⁴

1. The image.
2. The intention of this image.
3. Making the intention internally present.
4. Linking the intention with the proper image.

All these are necessary constituents in the process. However, since remembrance has been defined specifically as concerned with apprehending intentions (which is, at best, part of the process),²⁵ the activity of the rememorative faculty as a whole must draw on other

²³ Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, p. 49: “Et ista actio est virtutis quae dicitur rememorativa.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

²⁵ Cf. further Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, p. 60. Coleman (1992) 404, is wrong in saying that the specific function of remembrance is both 3 and 4, and she herself apparently contradicts her own claim on p. 405. The mistake is caused by careless language on Averroes’ part. Cf. also Black (1996) 166n16.

faculties of the soul; otherwise the act is not completed. First, sensation is needed to bring about an image. Second, an imaginative faculty is needed in order to bring forth the image belonging to a particular intention. And third, a faculty is needed to combine the image and the intention. This faculty, is said to be the intellect in human beings, while it is a natural capacity or instinct in animals, a capacity for which Averroes has no proper name.²⁶ Again, this shows that Averroes has weakened the distinction between memory (remembrance) and recollection (search through remembrance). For according to Aristotle's theory memory and recollection are two completely different occurrences, but in Averroes' treatise they partly follow the same general procedure. When the third faculty has performed its function, the activity of the rememorative faculty has been completed.

Finally, Averroes also finds room for a retentive memory. Partly following Avicenna, he posits a five-part structure:²⁷

1. The sensible form as existing outside the soul (*extra animam*).
2. The sensible form in the common sense (*sensus communis*).
3. The sensible form in the imaginative faculty (*virtus imaginativa*).²⁸
4. The sensible form in the distinguishing faculty (*virtus distinctiva*).²⁹
5. The sensible form in the rememorative faculty (*virtus rememorativa*).

²⁶ Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, p. 52. He notes, however, that the faculty was called *existimatio* (*versio vulgata*) or *aestimatio* (*versio Parisina*) by Avicenna. Averroes' reluctance to attribute the exercise to *aestimatio* is probably caused by his general wish to eliminate this faculty. Cf. Black (1996) 164-5, but see Coleman (1992) 406, for another suggestion.

²⁷ Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, pp. 58-9.

²⁸ That is, *imaginatio* defined as the faculty that retains sensible images.

²⁹ There are some unclarities in the commentary as to the precise definition of this distinguishing faculty, but I will not go further into these, since the main topic of this article is memory.

At each of these stages, the sensible form is found with increasing "spirituality" (*spiritualitas*). Knowing Avicenna's clear-cut, famous distinction between form and intention,³⁰ it may sound odd that the sensible form is found in memory, since memory apprehends intentions. However, the definition found in the epitome is not exclusive like Avicenna's; that is, an object does not have to be *either* a form *or* an intention. Thus, Averroes explicitly states that it is the same sensible form that is found in the image and in the intention; it differs only in degree of spirituality (*spiritualitas*).³¹ And he illustrates this by saying that the intention is, so to speak, the form of the image, which is conceived as the subject of the form.³² This seems to signify that intentions refer to the constitutive or structural elements of the form, that is, the most basic elements of the individual or particular form separated from its corporeal subject.³³

No. 5 in the above table is obtained when the distinguishing faculty separates the intention from the sensible image and puts it in the storing place of memory. This fifth faculty has two modes of being.³⁴ First, it can be viewed as a continuously preserving faculty, and in this case it is named "preserving (faculty)" (*conservans*). However, it can also be seen as non-continuous, that is, as a faculty that somehow has the intention stored, though it has been forgotten, and then it takes an effort to make the intention present.³⁵ This, Averroes says, is remembrance (*rememoratio*). Still, he explicitly says that the preserving faculty and remembrance constitute a single faculty, though with different modes of activity or being.³⁶ Therefore, it does not seem likely that the preserving

³⁰ Avicenna, *Liber de anima* I.5, ed. S. van Riet, vol. 1, p. 86.

³¹ Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, pp. 58-9.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 53-4: "in formis enim imaginabilibus est aliquid quasi subiectum, scilicet lineatio et figura, et aliquid quasi forma, et est intentio illius figurae."

³³ It must be the *individual* form, since memory apprehends only particulars.

³⁴ Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, pp. 48-9, 55, 59-60.

³⁵ Not, of course, a major effort involving the mind and deliberation, since that would be "search through remembrance" (see the distinction in the third description cited above).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49: "Ista igitur virtus est una in subiecto et duae secundum modum."

faculty is purely retentive. Averroes has a very revealing remark on the preserving faculty and remembrance:

However, remembrance differs from preservation, because preservation is of that which was always in the soul, after having been apprehended, while remembrance is of that which was forgotten. And for this reason remembrance is discontinued preservation, while preservation is continuous remembrance.³⁷

If remembrance can be called “discontinued preservation”, it must be, because the state that one obtains after a period of having forgotten the object is reasonably termed “preservation”. But then the state obtained must be one of attending to the object, that is, having the object present to attention. Otherwise, it makes little sense to go from having forgotten to remembering, if neither constitutes an attentive state. It might be said that both the preserving faculty and remembrance (in this sense) are preserving faculties that (also) make the intention internally present. Thus, under this description, the rememorative faculty stores and activates intentions which are defined as the essential parts of the individual sensible form obtained.

So, we have in the Averroean theory of memory the following different aspects: a basically retentive capacity (*conservans*), the capacity to bring forth the intention (*rememoratio*), the capacity to directly cognise the remembered object (*rememoratio*), a description of the memory process (*actus virtutis rememorativae* or *rememoratio*), and the deliberate search for a particular internal object that does not easily present itself (*inquisitio/investigatio per rememorationem*). This amounts, I believe, to a very comprehensive and complex theory.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9: “Rememoratio autem differt a conservatione, quia conservatio est illius quod semper fuit in anima, postquam fuit comprehensum, rememoratio autem est eius quod fuit oblitum. Et ideo rememoratio est conservatio abscisa, conservatio autem est rememoratio continua.”

IV. COLEMAN ON AVERROES' THEORY OF MEMORY

The Averroean theory of memory that I have now presented is very different from the interpretation which Janet Coleman sets forth in her *Ancient and Medieval Memories: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (1992). Our disagreements are fundamental ones, and in light of the limited amount of studies in this particular subject, it seems only proper to spell out my reasons for rejecting her interpretation before moving on to the conclusions of this article.

I will single out three points of disagreement between my interpretation of Averroes and Coleman's:

1. The concept of "remembrance" (*rememoratio*), as regards non-human animals.
2. The use of the term *memoratio* in Averroes.
3. Averroes's epitome as an interpretation of Aristotle's *De memoria*.

No. 1 is the crucial difference, and even the treatment of nos. 2 and 3 cannot be separated from the treatment of no. 1.

Rememoratio, Coleman says,³⁸ is found only in human beings, not in other animals. It is a kind of recall, appropriate to man alone, and Averroes, according to her, makes a distinction between "recall" (or "remembrance") and "memory" (*memoratio*). Thus, Coleman says, when Averroes talks about remembrance, or "the *rememorativa*'s power", he is clearly discussing "the reminiscient capacity of which Aristotle spoke".

This is a very difficult interpretation for several reasons, but the most important objection is that it seems to be explicitly contradicted by the text. Thus, in the description of the four elements in the process of remembrance (see above), Averroes attributes a rememorative capacity to non-human animals and also says that they are capable of "rememorating" (*rememorant* = "recall" according to Coleman,

³⁸ Coleman (1992) 402-3, 414.

“remember” according to my interpretation).³⁹ Therefore, remembrance is not an exclusively human faculty. This conclusion is, I believe, born out also by the rest of the text.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Coleman is right that remembrance is not really identical with the Aristotelian concept of memory. The reason for this is not, however, that it is instead identical with Aristotle’s concept of recollection, but rather that Averroes’ concept of memory (*rememoratio*) is significantly broader than the Aristotelian one and comprises such different features as retention, process and actual cognition, much like a modern concept of memory. This Averroean concept has already been analysed above, and I will say more about it in the following sections.⁴¹

Another difficulty for Coleman’s interpretation concerns no. 2 above, *viz.* the use of the term *memoratio* as signifying memory, whereas *rememoratio* is claimed to be the Latin Averroean term for recollection. For if Coleman is right about this, that is, if the key term *rememoratio* covers only a kind of recollection, not memory, there is very little discussion of memory in Averroes’ treatise. I have noted only one occurrence of *memoratio* in the part of the *Epitome of the Parva naturalia* (*versio vulgata*) that is specifically concerned with memory,

³⁹ Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, pp. 52-3: “Et in *animalibus rememorativis* est simile intellectui: Ista enim virtus est in homine per cognitionem, et ideo investigat per rememorationem. In aliis autem est natura, et ideo *rememorant animalia*, sed non investigant per rememorationem.” = “And in *rememorative animals* [the faculty] is one similar to the intellect: For in man this faculty is something that he has through cognition, and therefore he can search through remembrance. But other animals have this faculty by nature, and therefore *animals have remembrance*, but they do not search through remembrance.” (My emphasis). Coleman (1992) 405, cites this passage but does not comment on the apparent contradiction of her view. My interpretation seems to be in accordance with that of Black. Cf. in particular Black (1996) 162-3n5. See also White & Macierowski (2005) 174-5.

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, p. 55, comparing *virtus rememorativa* and *virtus imaginativa* with a direct reference to Aristotle, which can only be to chapter 1 (on memory) of the *De memoria*, since imagination (φαντασία) is not mentioned in chapter 2 (on recollection).

⁴¹ For now I will only mention that remembrance has been expanded so as to let it comprise parts of the conceptual territory otherwise occupied by recollection.

and there it is used to make a distinction between the concept signified by that word and “search through remembrance”.⁴² This indicates that *memoratio* is here to be taken in the sense of “*rememoratio*”. Such an interpretation is supported by the fact that the single occurrence of *memorans* is found in a passage concerned with the physical location of the different faculties; and in this passage it is coupled with the “preserving faculty”.⁴³ This kind of coupling has been performed several times before in the text, but always with the preserving faculty and *rememoratio* as the two concepts used.⁴⁴ Thus, it seems certain that *memorans* must mean *rememorans*.⁴⁵ The Latins may have been confused by this apparent shift in terminology (although judging from the commentaries of such writers as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, they were not), but there will have been no problem in the original Arabic text.⁴⁶

Finally, as regards no. 3 above, it will be seen from the next section on the compatibility of Aristotle and Averroes that I do not believe that the latter’s epitome really constitutes an interpretation of Aristotle’s treatise; at least not of the version of Aristotle’s *De memoria* that has been transmitted to us. In that section I present two major difficulties in regarding Averroes’ epitome as a commentary on Aristotle’s *De memoria*, and it might be added that the general structure of Averroes’ text on memory does not recognisably follow the Aristotelian structure,

⁴² Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, p. 48: “Et ideo visum est quod investigatio per rememorationem est propria homini. Memoratio autem est in omnibus animalibus imaginantibus.” = “And for this reason it is seen that search through remembrance is a proper characteristic of man. But memory is in all animals that possess imagination.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 57: “... deinde memorans et conservans in posteriori cerebri.” = “... thereafter the remembering and the preserving faculties [are found] in the back part of the brain.”

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9, 55.

⁴⁵ Further evidence *ibid.*, pp. 58, 71, in which passages *memoria* seems to be used for *rememoratio*.

⁴⁶ Cf. Black (1996) 162-3n5. It must also be noted that textual corruption of the Latin cannot be ruled out.

although they do have some similar traits. However, Coleman argues⁴⁷ that we find in Averroes a summary of Aristotle's conclusions, based on a sensitive reading and with an original reordering and elaboration by Averroes himself. On almost any reading of Aristotle, including Coleman's own,⁴⁸ this seems to be a very difficult interpretation to uphold, and combined with her reading of Averroes it becomes, I think, impossible. For, as we have just seen, Aristotle's concept of memory is not really treated by Averroes, according to Coleman: Remembrance, she says, is the one important concept of his treatise, and, according to her, this term refers to Aristotelian recollection.

V. COMPATIBILITY: ARISTOTLE AND AVERROES

I think, then, it is fair to say that Averroes' *Epitome of the Parva naturalia* is not a very big help when one is trying to understand Aristotle's *De memoria*.⁴⁹ So little of Aristotle has survived in the Averroean "interpretation" that it is better to view Averroes' text not so much as an interpretation but rather as a theory of memory in its own right. In particular, two difficulties in the Latin Averroes' analysis of memory, if regarded as an interpretation of Aristotle, may be singled out:

1. The action of the rememorative faculty in the four-stage process somehow comprises both images and intentions.
2. Remembrance and search through remembrance are not in any sense identical with Aristotelian memory and recollection.

Concerning no. 1, the Averroean theory was certainly confusing to some Latin interpreters (e.g. Albert the Great), who thought the Arabs held that memory contains both images and intentions.⁵⁰ For, although both

⁴⁷ Coleman (1992) 402.

⁴⁸ Coleman (1992) 15-34.

⁴⁹ Cf. also Gätje (1971) 85. *Contra* Coleman (1992) 402. And see further my criticism above.

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. Albertus Magnus, *Liber de memoria*, ed. P. Jammy, vol. 5, 1651, p. 53a: "Ex his igitur patet, quod conservativa secundum Averroem non differt a memoriali nisi

Avicenna and Averroes explicitly say that the objects of memory (*memoria* or *rememoratio*) are intentions, the latter's analysis of the activity of the rememorative faculty shows that the imaginative faculty is not only needed in the process, but images are even part of the final result of the act, viz. the combination of image and intention. Thus, the broad and unclear concept of remembrance causes difficulties of interpretation at this level. This broad and complicated theory is, I believe, incompatible with Aristotle's narrow concepts of memory and recollection.

As regards no. 2, the concept of "remembrance" is made even further unclear, because Averroes softens the difference between this faculty and "search through remembrance". Still, he must take account of the fact that, according to Aristotle with whom Averroes here agrees,⁵¹ many animals have the capacity of remembrance, but only human beings are capable of conducting a search through remembrance. However, Averroes does not regard these as entirely different processes, and he does not interpret Aristotle's theories of memory and recollection as comprising two basically and essentially different capabilities. As we have seen, then, the processes are not too different, according to his theory, and thus he must handle opposing tendencies in his account. The problem is solved by stating that remembrance and search through remembrance only differ at the stage at which images and intentions are combined; for in human beings this is done by the intellect, while animals combine them by natural instinct.⁵² So, if the process runs smoothly and without any problems, it is remembrance, and both human

secundum esse; quia conservativa conservat tam imagines quam intentiones, sed memoria componendo ista duo refertur ad res extra per ipsa." = "From these, then, it is clear that, according to Averroes, the preserving faculty does not differ from the memorative, except as regards its being; for the preserving faculty preserves both images and intentions, but memory combines these two elements and thereby refers to the external things through these." Compare Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, pp. 48-9.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *De memoria* 2, 453a8-10; id., *Historia animalium* I.1, 488b24-6. Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, pp. 48, 52-3.

⁵² Averroes, *Compendium de memoria*, ed. Shields, pp. 52-3.

beings and animals are capable of performing it. But when a particular intention is not easily obtained, then animals have no way of obtaining it; in fact, they do not know that they cannot obtain it. Human beings, on the other hand, have the power of will and the intellect, and therefore they are able to conduct a search for the intention that may eventually lead to the desired result. That is, the third faculty in the act of memory described above is much more powerful in human beings than in other animals.

The use of mind does, of course, constitute a substantial difference between remembrance and search through remembrance, but any modern reader of Aristotle's *De memoria* will appreciate that, according to the theory set forth in that text, the difference between memory and recollection is much greater than the Averroean distinction allows. Aristotle claims that they are two absolutely different occurrences, and they each occur completely separated from each other in different kinds of "soul", viz. the sensing soul and the rational soul respectively. According to Averroes' analysis, they both start out in the sensing soul, and human beings are then able to apply the intellect to the process, if it does not run smoothly. It seems, as has already been noted, that Averroes' remembrance has conquered some of the conceptual territory that was occupied by recollection in the Aristotelian theory.

VI. CONCLUSION: THE EPITOME AND THE LATIN PHILOSOPHERS

Thus, Averroes's *Epitome of the Parva naturalia* must be interpreted basically on the same criteria as Avicenna's *Liber de anima*: as the work of a Peripatetic philosopher, but with many thoughts and ideas that are not obviously Aristotelian, and sometimes not even obviously compatible with Aristotle's. Presumably, the difficult Aristotelian theory and the rich conceptual apparatus which Averroes inherited from Avicenna and the earlier tradition of Arabic philosophy enabled him to state a much

broadier theory than these two predecessors; in particular, he made good use of the concepts of internal senses.⁵³

However, the Latins regarded Averroes' epitome as a useful interpretation of Aristotle. The Aristotelian concept of memory is narrow, and the Latin thinkers had found a similarly narrow concept in Avicenna, for whom it signifies primarily the retention of intentions,⁵⁴ although in some passages of his *Liber de anima*, he hints that a broader concept of a remembering faculty may be found.⁵⁵

In Averroes the Latins found the Aristotelian division between memory and recollection, superficially retained by the use of the concepts "remembrance" and "search through remembrance", but Averroes provides broader definitions. Thus, he expanded the concept of memory, and the theory that the Latins inherited from him was much more in line with general Latin usage and thoughts on the issue. It seems, then, that Averroes had developed a concept of memory which the Latins appreciated as *useful* and *broad*, based on a Peripatetic foundation. It was not, apparently, discussed whether or not this concept was in accord with the Aristotelian one, although some thinkers may well have felt the difficulty.⁵⁶

⁵³ On the theory of internal senses, which was not, of course, Avicenna's conceptual invention, cf. Wolfson (1935); Rahman (1952) 77-83; G. Verbeke's introduction in Avicenna, *Liber de anima*, vol. 2, ed. S. van Riet, Louvain-Leiden 1968-1972, pp. 46*-59*.

⁵⁴ Cf. e.g. Avicenna, *Liber de anima* I.5, IV.1, ed. S. van Riet, pp. 89 (vol. 1), 9 (vol. 2). But Black (1996) 164, is wrong in claiming that "memory is, for Avicenna, explicitly and only a retentive faculty" (see the following note).

⁵⁵ Cf. the initial description of memory in Avicenna, *Liber de anima* I.5, ed. S. van Riet, p. 89, as "the memorative and recollective power" (*vis memorialis et reminiscibilis*), and some passages in the work even suggests that Avicenna himself did not regard memory as narrowly, cf. *ibid.* IV.1, vol. 2, pp. 9-11. Certainly, some Latin thinkers were inspired by these passages, cf., most importantly, Dominicus Gundissalinus, *Liber de anima*, in Muckle (1940) 71, 74, 78. See also Anonymus, *De potentiis animae et obiectis*, in Callus (1952) 154; Anonymus, *De anima et de potentiis eius*, in Gauthier (1982) 46-7.

⁵⁶ In particular, Albert the Great conspicuously stated *two* theories of memory in his paraphrase of the *De memoria*: a Peripatetic (which is basically Averroes' theory) and the Aristotelian (based on the *De memoria*), and he did not make a serious attempt to

About ten years ago, Deborah Black complained that, since the Latin middle ages, Averroes' concept of memory had (wrongly) been regarded as merely retentive.⁵⁷ There is certainly some truth in this, since Latin authors often did not really distinguish between the theories of Avicenna and Averroes.⁵⁸ However, the Latins, from Albert the Great and onwards, did develop a broad concept of memory. In his capacity of *Commentator*, the Latin Averroes is likely to have been at least one of the major influences, and, as I have tried to establish, his own broad theory was in fact well suited for such a purpose. So, even though the Latins may not always have been conscious of the fact, since they regularly confused the theories of Avicenna and Averroes, they did find a broad concept of memory in Averroes.

interpret the Aristotelian through the Peripatetic. Cf. Albertus Magnus, *Liber de memoria*, ed. P. Jammy, vol. 5, 1651, pp. 52a-53a. Aquinas, apparently, did not see the difficulties.

⁵⁷ Black (1996) 164-5.

⁵⁸ For clear examples of this, cf. Albertus Magnus, *Liber de memoria*, ed. P. Jammy, vol. 5, 1651, pp. 52a-53a, who makes no significant distinction between Avicenna and Averroes; Petrus de Alvernia, *Quaestiones super De memoria et reminiscentia* q. 11, ms.: Oxford, Merton College 275: f. 215vb-216ra, who mistakenly attributes Averroes' theory of memory to Avicenna.

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