
Averroës: Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De anima. A Critical Edition of the Arabic Text with English Translation, Notes, and Introduction by Alfred L. Ivry

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Averroes (Ibn Rushd), ‘the commentator’, wrote short, middle, and long commentaries on Aristotle’s texts—short and middle on almost all the treatises and long on five (viz *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*, *De caelo*, *De anima*, and *Metaphysics*). The *De anima* was undoubtedly one of the most influential texts in the Middle Ages. Of Averroes’ three commentaries on this text, we have a relatively new edition of the short commentary by Salvador Gomez Nogales from 1985, a critical edition of the Latin translation of the long commentary by F. Stuart Crawford from 1953 (the Arabic is no longer extant), and now the long-awaited, annotated, critical edition with an English translation of the middle commentary by Alfred L. Ivry.

Professor Ivry is certainly the best qualified scholar to undertake this task and the result, as far as I can judge, leaves nothing to be desired. His edition and translation set the highest standard and can serve as a model for anyone who works on a medieval text. The notes reflect Ivry’s wide and deep erudition in Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew philosophy; and they provide everything that the reader expects to find in notes and much more. The book includes an Arabic-Hebrew-Greek-Latin glossary, a very rich bibliography, and good indices. The publisher did a good job with the four alphabets, and the Arabic font is easy to read (which is not always the case in Arabic editions). The ‘Averroist community’ is now waiting for Ivry’s edition of the Hebrew translation by Moshe Ibn Tibbon, the publication of which by the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities is long awaited.

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I should like to dwell somewhat at length on the introduction. In recent years scholars have increasingly noticed that during his life Averroes changed his position on cardinal issues.¹ These changes of mind are reflected in incompatibilities between the discussions of a given treatise in the short, middle, and long commentaries, as well as in the revisions of a given commentary.

The question of the relationship of the middle commentary on the *De anima* to the long commentary and of the revisions of both has been the subject of much debate recently. Several years ago Ivry contended that (1) Averroes revised the middle commentary at least once, and that (2) Averroes ‘composed the middle commentary from the start after the long’ [Ivry 1995: cf. 83]. This suggestion was hard to accept and evoked much criticism, notably by Davidson [1997]. Two years later, Ivry [1999] came back to this major question and he does so again in the introduction to the present edition of the middle commentary. His updated statement of the two contentions is:

(1) it is possible, and even likely that Averroes made certain revisions in both commentaries—the middle after its initial publication and the long before its publication. [xxvi]

and

(2) Averroes composed his middle commentary of *De anima* after his long commentary, even if very shortly after. [xxv]

Let me start with the more controversial contention, (2). In an interesting passage, hitherto unnoticed,² Averroes testifies:

... we have the book of animals and we have already completed its commentary according to the signification and we shall further work, if God wills in our life, on its word by word commentary, as we shall try to do, God willing, in the rest of his books. We have not yet the opportunity to carry out this intention except in the case of *De anima*, and this

¹ I shall mention a few examples. On the *Physics*, see Puig Montada 1997 and Harvey 2004. On the *De caelo*, see Hugonnard-Roche 1977 and Endress 1995. On *Generation and Corruption*, see Puig Montada 1996. On the *De anima*, see Druart 1994. Druart also discusses the commentaries on the *Physics* and *De caelo*, but focuses mainly on the *De anima*.

² It is virtually unknown because it is missing in the Latin translation and appears only in the Hebrew translation.

book that we start now [the *Physics*]. But we have already laid down commentaries on all his books according to the signification in the three disciplines, logic, natural science, and metaphysics.³

The ‘commentary according to the signification’ (*‘shar ‘alā l-ma‘ana’*, *be’ur ke-fi ha-‘inyan*) is the middle commentary and the word by word commentary (*‘shar ‘alā l-lafz’*, *be’ur mila be-mila*) is the long commentary. From this passage we learn that of the five long commentaries, that on the *De anima* was the first to be written. The long commentary on the *Physics* is commonly dated to 1186, but there is no decisive evidence to support this dating.⁴ Still, if this dating is correct, it means that the long commentary on the *De anima* was written before 1186 and not about 1190 as Alonso and Al-‘Alawi suggest.⁵ The middle commentary on the *De anima* is dated to 1181, but this too is not certain.⁶ The passage quoted above thus implies that the middle commentaries were written before the long with a possible exception of the middle commentary on the *De anima*. The middle commentary on the *De anima* is late among the middle commentaries, while the long is the earliest of the long commentaries. The two commentaries were, thus, written during the same period.

This information indicates that Ivry’s second contention is possible. My study (currently in progress) of Averroes’ three commentaries on the *Physics* indicates that Ivry’s first contention is highly likely. Both the short and middle commentaries on the *Physics* were revised after the long commentary was written and the long commentary itself was heavily revised.

Ivry comments:

Oddly, though, [i] Averroes does not recant his middle commentary position in the long commentary or even refer to

³ Averroes, *Long Commentary on the Physics* I.57, Hebrew translation Paris BNF ms. heb 884, fol. 35b11–16. In the Latin translation (Junta’s edition fol. 34K11) this passage is missing.

⁴ See Puig Montada 1997, 118–119; Harvey 2004, n15; Al-‘Alawi 1986, 55–57, 73–74.

⁵ See Ivry 1995, 77n10; Al-‘Alawi 1986, 108–109.

⁶ See Puig Montada 1998, 125; Ivry 1995, 77n9.

it, which he should if Davidson's view on the order of their composition is to be accepted. In the middle commentary, on the other hand, [ii] Averroes twice refers, in my reading, to the long commentary for a fuller exposition of this subject. [xxvii]

Such 'oddities' also occur in the commentaries on the *Physics*.

On [ii] Davidson comments that the cross-references are not sufficient evidence because 'Averroes is known to have gone back and added notes to works he had written earlier.'⁷ I shall add that Puig Montada [1987] found in the short commentary two references to the long commentary, which surely confirms that the short commentary was revised.

On [i] I shall remark that in the case of the *Physics* there is no question of 'recanting' what was said in the middle commentary but, rather, the issue is one of 'remembering' what was said there. On several points Averroes starts from the beginning in the long commentary, very oddly ignoring what he himself said and emphasized in the middle commentary. The reason for this, as I have come to conclude, is that the middle commentary was revised and includes passages that are later than the long commentary.

Let me summarize the results of this brief comparison with the *Physics*:

- Ivry's second contention is chronologically possible.
- In the case of the *Physics* the second contention is ruled out, because we know for certain that the long commentary was written after the middle.
- The 'oddities' in the commentaries on the *Physics* can be explained in terms of the first contention, namely, that parts of the middle commentary were written after the long commentary.

I offer these remarks about Averroes' commentaries on the *Physics* in the hope that they will be useful for the study of his commentaries on the *De anima*.

⁷ Davidson [1997, 143–144] himself offers a more radical answer—'another reading of the two passages'. See also Ivry's comment at 1997, 148n58.

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