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Professor Trifogli offers an informative and useful overview of Ruth Glasner's book *Averroes' Physics: A Turning Point in Medieval Natural Philosophy*.¹ It is far beyond my competence to comment on her disagreements with the book, except, I hope, for a single, but essential, methodological point. Before formulating it, in the interest of disclosure, let me state that Professor Glasner has been a close friend and an esteemed colleague of mine for many years; I do not think however that this biographical fact in any way interferes with what I am about to say.

Professor Trifogli writes as if Glasner started with a given body of textual evidence, and set out to 'reconstruct' Averroes' late physics. Weighing what she takes to be the 'evidence' against the reconstruction of Averroes' thought process as proposed by Glasner, she finds that the evidence is insufficient:

What textual evidence does this complex system of revisions of the three *Physics* commentaries provide for Averroes' new physics? [82]

she asks before concluding, 'However, it is not supported by adequate textual evidence and is not in itself very convincing' [84].

A word on the state of the 'textual evidence' is in order. It is not the case that we have in hand two or more versions of each of Averroes' three commentaries on the *Physics* and then try to reconstruct the development of his thinking. The situation is much more complex. When one compares the manuscripts of the commentaries, some available in Arabic, some in Hebrew, some in Latin, one faces chaos: while a large basic text is (more or less) common to

¹ *Aestimatio* 7 (2010), 78–88. http://www.ircps.org/publications/aestimatio/pdf/Volume7/2010-12_Trifogli.pdf.

the manuscripts of a given commentary, there are also various small textual units (a sentence or a few sentences) that are not part of this shared text and are found in some but not in all the manuscripts of a given text. Thus, we are confronted with a very large set of small unconnected textual units haphazardly (as it seems) accompanying the shared text in diverse manuscripts. A first question facing the researcher is, Can they all be assumed to go back to Averroes himself? Certainly not at the beginning of the research: at the outset one has rather to assume that some of these isolated textual units could be glosses by scribes or readers. Only when the global picture begins to emerge will one feel confident to decide which textual units are Averroean and which not.

Assume now that a selection has been made and that the inauthentic textual units have been eliminated. For each commentary, one then has a set of unsystematic variations between the manuscripts, which one takes to go back to Averroes. It seems natural to conjecture that they were penned at different moments and reflect different states of Averroes' thought. But they still form a chaotic gathering because almost each manuscript has its own text and textual variations. How was this chaos formed? Glasner (plausibly) assumes that over many years Averroes revised and added marginal glosses to a 'master copy' that was repeatedly copied by various scribes at different moments. Each such copy thus reflected a different state of advancement of the 'master copy'. Farther down the road, copyists and translators were confronted with manuscripts carrying differing texts and marginalia, and made decisions as to what should be copied and what not. The result is the observed chaos where two manuscripts of a given text are rarely identical.

One of Glasner's major achievements is this: by working through the thicket of the unshared textual units, she has introduced some intelligible order. Put differently: she has found a hypothesis that accounts for the evolution of Averroes' thought and allows her to assign each textual unit to a stage in this development, thereby arranging the textual units in chronological order. Recall that the textual units are not dated and that you cannot know to which chronological 'layer' any given textual unit belongs. Without knowing the pattern of the jigsaw puzzle—how can one even try to put the pieces in order? There is only one possible way (as far as I can see): to try to imagine different evolutionary patterns of Averroes' thought and to see if

they fit the bill, i.e., if they allow a coherent, intellectually plausible ordering of the texts. To arrive from a chaos of unordered texts to a likely reconstruction of the evolution of Averroes' thought demands a considerable measure of imagination and intuition in addition to real philological competence in their languages, not to mention infinite patience.

This, then, is Glasner's major accomplishment: to have had the uncommonly penetrating insight that allowed her to transport herself into the mindset of Averroes (to rephrase Dilthey) and to envision a reconstruction of his thought, given a disordered body of textual units. This she did through a process of conjectures and refutations: she framed and rejected successive hypotheses before arriving at the one which she presented in her book and which in her judgment best accounts for the evidence that she had amassed.

When Professor Trifogli writes, 'it is not supported by adequate textual evidence', she writes as if the evidence was out there, independent of the gathering process that had constituted it. She overlooks that the 'evidence' itself is a constructed set of textual units that became 'evidence' through the long process of trial and error in which it was assembled. Constituting the body of 'evidence' and hypothesis-formation went hand in hand. It is, therefore, a bit misleading to write as if we had a body of evidence on the one hand and a hypothesis on the other. More important, the philosophy of science has long taught us that any body of evidence can be explained in a great many (in theory, infinitely many) different ways. The present case is no exception and conceivably Averroes' thought can be reconstructed in different ways than that proposed by Glasner. In such a situation, the only sound methodology of criticism is to show that an alternative reconstruction of Averroes' thought exists that does better justice to all the available texts. It is facile, and unfair, to content oneself with voicing the subjective feeling that Glasner's hypothesis 'is not in itself very convincing': one really must indicate a more convincing alternative. On this, however, Professor Trifogli does not say a word. The challenge is at her door.