

## **The Ontology of Intellect and the Universality of Knowledge: A Comparative Analysis of Averroes and Aquinas**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the epistemological and metaphysical disagreement between Averroes and Thomas Aquinas, particularly focusing on the ontological status of the intellect and the intelligible in act. Drawing primarily from Averroes' *Long Commentary on the De Anima* and Aquinas' *De Unitate Intellectus*, it is argued that the core of their divergence lies not in logical failure but in the adoption of fundamentally different metaphysical premises. While Averroes defends the unity of the Material Intellect as a prerequisite for the universality of scientific knowledge, Aquinas posits individualized intellects and insists that intelligibles in act can exist in multiple human minds. By tracing the conceptual role of cogitative power, abstraction, and intellectual individuation, the article reassesses the validity of Aquinas' critique and evaluates the coherence of Averroes' position within Aristotelian psychology.

**Keywords:** Averroes; Thomas Aquinas; Unity of the Intellect; Material Intellect; Agent Intellect; Intelligible in Act; Aristotelian Psychology; Medieval Epistemology; Metaphysics of Knowledge; Universality of Science; Cogitative Power; Hylomorphism; Intersubjectivity; Personal Agency; Transpersonal Cognition.

## 1. Introduction

The medieval debate over the nature of human intellect and the universality of knowledge reached a pivotal moment in the encounter between Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and Thomas Aquinas. At the heart of this dispute lies the controversial claim associated with Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle: that the human intellect is one and the same for all individuals (*unus intellectus*). Aquinas' *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas* represents a systematic refutation of this thesis, aiming to preserve the individuality of human intellectual acts and the theological implications tied to personal responsibility, freedom, and immortality.

The reception of Aristotle's *De Anima* in the Islamic world—most notably through the extensive commentaries of Averroes—played a critical role in shaping Latin scholastic philosophy. Averroes' *Long Commentary* introduced a sophisticated epistemology based on a dualist framework involving the Agent Intellect (*intellectus agens*) and the Material Intellect (*intellectus possibilis*), both conceived as separate substances. In this model, understanding occurs not within the individual's soul but through participation in a universal intellect common to all rational beings.

Aquinas, however, challenges this framework on both metaphysical and theological grounds. He asserts the multiplicity of intellects and maintains that each human being possesses their own capacity for intellectual abstraction. From his perspective, the Averroist thesis leads to the untenable consequence that human beings do not truly think as individuals (*non homo intelligit*), thereby undermining the very foundations of personal identity and moral agency.

This article aims to revisit the epistemological divergence between Averroes and Aquinas by focusing on the ontological status of the intelligible in act (*intellectum in actu*). It proposes that the apparent incompatibility between their views is not a matter of faulty logic or misunderstanding, but rather arises from distinct metaphysical commitments concerning the nature of rationality, abstraction, and the requirements of universal science. By analyzing both thinkers' conceptions of the cogitative power, the process of intellectual abstraction, and the metaphysics of intelligibles, the article seeks to demonstrate that Aquinas' critique, while rhetorically powerful, does not succeed in refuting Averroes on Averroes' own terms.

## 2. Averroes' Theory of the Intellect

Averroes' mature epistemology, particularly as presented in his *Long Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, reflects a sophisticated reinterpretation of Aristotelian psychology rooted

in both Neoplatonic and Islamic philosophical traditions. His theory of the intellect centers around the distinction between two separate but complementary intellectual substances: the Agent Intellect (*intellectus agens*) and the Material Intellect (*intellectus possibilis*). These are not faculties or powers within the individual human soul, but distinct, immaterial entities ontologically external to individual persons. According to Averroes, the realization of universal knowledge—scientific understanding—requires that the intelligible forms exist in act within the Material Intellect, which is singular and shared among all humans (Taylor, 1999, pp. 148–149).

Averroes begins with the Aristotelian claim that all knowledge originates in sense perception. The five external senses apprehend the sensible qualities of objects, which are then synthesized by the *common sense*. From this synthesis, internal faculties such as imagination (*phantasia*), memory, and the cogitative power (*vis cogitativa*) process the representations of particular objects. The cogitative power, in particular, plays a crucial role in distinguishing and abstracting *individual intentions*—images stripped of their purely sensible accidents—which are stored in memory and serve as the raw material for intellectual cognition (Taylor, 1999, pp. 152–155).

Yet, Averroes argues that the cogitative power, being a bodily and corruptible faculty, cannot grasp universals as such. It is capable only of dealing with particulars, and even its discernments are inseparable from the material substratum. As such, the transition from the particular to the universal demands a higher power: the Agent Intellect, which illuminates the denuded intentions provided by the cogitative power, thus rendering them intelligible in act. However, the actual intelligible does not reside in the human soul but in the separate Material Intellect. This intellect, eternally actualized by the light of the Agent Intellect, serves as the repository (*thesaurus*) of universal forms, allowing for scientific knowledge to be grounded in a common intelligible framework (Taylor, 1999, pp. 156–161).

Crucially, the intelligibles in act (*intellecta in actu*) cannot exist in individual humans as such, since any reception into a particular mind—a “*this*”—would entail particularization and, consequently, the destruction of universality. Thus, according to Averroes, intelligibles in act must be housed in a unique, immaterial, and non-particular intellect—one that is metaphysically unbounded and ontologically distinct from material individuals (Taylor, 1999, pp. 160–167). The Material Intellect is therefore not only singular but also the necessary condition for universal discourse, intersubjective knowledge, and scientific demonstration.

Moreover, while individuals cannot possess intelligibles in act, they participate in them through a natural and operational connection with the Material Intellect. This participation is expressed through *speculative cogitation* and the individual's ability to classify and recognize new instances in light of intelligibles previously accessed. In this framework, human rationality is cooperative rather than proprietary: while the act of understanding belongs formally to the separate intellect, the human soul cooperates materially by preparing the phantasms and intentions that make abstraction possible (Taylor, 1999, pp. 173–175).

Averroes' theory, then, hinges on the following ontological and epistemological commitments:

- Knowledge is universal and must be grounded in a common, non-particular intellect.
- The intelligibles in act cannot exist in individuals without losing their universality.
- Human cognition involves both bodily and immaterial operations, culminating in participation in the separate Material Intellect.

This account, though radically different from the model proposed by Aquinas, is internally coherent and aims to preserve both Aristotelian realism and the unity of scientific knowledge across human subjects.

### 3. Aquinas' Critique in *De Unitate Intellectus*

Thomas Aquinas' *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas* (c. 1270) stands as one of the most systematic and polemical efforts in medieval philosophy to refute the doctrine of the unity of the intellect, which Aquinas attributed to Averroes and his Latin followers. The primary target of Aquinas' critique is the denial of *homo intelligit*, that is, the claim that the act of understanding does not properly belong to individual human beings. For Aquinas, such a position not only contradicts common experience and Aristotelian anthropology but also undermines the foundations of moral responsibility, personal immortality, and the Christian doctrine of the rational soul (Taylor, 1999, pp. 164–167).

Aquinas' first line of critique targets Averroes' claim that intelligibles in act (*intellecta in actu*) cannot exist in individual intellects without becoming particularized and hence losing their universality. Against this, Aquinas posits that intelligibles in act are abstracted from material conditions and therefore capable of existing in individual minds without undergoing corruption or individuation. For Aquinas, intelligibility is impeded not by multiplicity but by materiality. Once abstracted from phantasms through the activity of the Agent Intellect, the

species intelligibilis can exist in multiple human intellects simultaneously without ceasing to be universal (Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1).

A second and deeper metaphysical objection concerns the ontological consequences of postulating a single, shared intellect for all humans. According to Aquinas, such a doctrine would entail that human cognition is not truly plural and that the distinctiveness of personal knowledge, judgment, and volition is an illusion. Moreover, Aquinas argues that if there were only one intellect, then no individual could be the proper subject of knowledge or moral action. This would make learning impossible, as a teacher could not communicate a concept that already exists in the shared intellect of the student. As Aquinas writes, this reduces education to an absurd form of *reminiscentia*, reminiscent of the Platonic model which he rejects (Taylor, 1999, pp. 166–167; *De Unitate Intellectus*, cap. 3–5). Furthermore, Aquinas challenges Averroes’ metaphysical principle that “the understood” (*intellectum*) must exist in only one intellect to preserve its universality. He insists that it is not the unity of the intellect that secures the universality of science, but rather the nature of the object itself. The quiddity (*quidditas*) or essence of a thing, such as the nature of a stone, remains one regardless of how many intellects grasp it. Hence, the same intelligible species can exist in multiple intellects without generating metaphysical incoherence or infinite regress. This allows Aquinas to maintain both the individuality of intellectual acts and the universality of scientific discourse (Taylor, 1999, pp. 167–169; Dewan, 1996, pp. 128–129).

Aquinas’ criticism culminates in a theological assertion: understanding and will must be rooted in the individual rational soul if personal immortality and judgment are to be preserved. The separation of intellect from the soul, as proposed by Averroes, effectively dissolves the human being into a mere conduit of intellectual activity without proper ownership of thought. For Aquinas, the intellect must therefore be a faculty *inherent* in each rational soul—immaterial, subsistent, and capable of understanding in act.

Although Thomas Aquinas’ arguments in the *De Unitate Intellectus* are marked by a high degree of conceptual clarity and logical rigor, Richard C. Taylor (1999) observes that their persuasive force is contingent upon certain metaphysical and epistemological assumptions that Averroes himself does not accept. Chief among these is the presupposition that intelligibles in act (*intellecta in actu*) can be instantiated in a plurality of individual intellects without thereby forfeiting their universality. For Aquinas, this principle underwrites his claim that the same universal form can exist immaterially in multiple human minds, each retaining its universal character independently of any singular subject. From Averroes’ standpoint, however, such

multiplication would inevitably entail a form of particularization, thereby compromising the universality that is essential to scientific knowledge. A second, equally significant assumption in Aquinas' critique is the notion that the possession of knowledge requires the ontological presence of the intelligible species within the individual soul. Aquinas' insistence on the immanence of intelligibles to the knowing subject reflects his broaderhylomorphic anthropology, in which intellectual activity is a faculty of the individual rational soul. Averroes, by contrast, construes intellection as a cooperative process in which the individual contributes materially—through the preparation of phantasms and intentions—while the formal act of understanding occurs in a single, separate, and universal Material Intellect.

#### 4. Comparative Metaphysics of the Intelligible in Act

At the heart of the metaphysical dispute between Averroes and Thomas Aquinas on the nature of human intellection lies a fundamental disagreement concerning the ontological status and the mode of existence of *intelligibles in act* (*intellecta in actu*). Both philosophers are united in their adherence to the Aristotelian dictum that the proper object of intellectual cognition is the *universal*—that which transcends the contingent and individuated features of sensible reality—as opposed to the *particular*, which is apprehended by the senses. Yet, despite this shared Aristotelian starting point, they diverge in a profound and irreconcilable manner when addressing the question of the locus and subject of these intelligibles in their fully actualized state. For Aquinas, intelligibles in act can, by virtue of their immateriality, subsist within multiple individual intellects without suffering any diminution of their universality. This allows him to maintain that each human being, as the possessor of an individualized rational soul, can house and directly possess the intelligible species, thereby integrating universal knowledge into the personal cognitive life of the subject. Averroes, by contrast, holds that the reception of an intelligible in act into any individuated, material-dependent faculty would inevitably entail its particularization and thus the loss of its essential universality. To safeguard the purity and intersubjective accessibility of universal knowledge, he locates intelligibles in act exclusively within a single, separate, and eternal Material Intellect, to which all human beings are naturally and operationally connected.

This divergence is not reducible to a difference in epistemological emphasis; rather, it is rooted in deeper and incompatible commitments concerning the principles of metaphysical individuation, the ontological nature of the intellect, and the necessary conditions for the possibility of scientific knowledge. In Aquinas' account, the metaphysical unity of the knower and the known within each individual intellect grounds both personal intellectual agency and

the theological affirmation of the soul's immortality. In Averroes' system, by contrast, the metaphysical unity of the intelligible content across all knowers is prioritized as the *sine qua non* for the stability, universality, and communicability of science.

#### 4.1. Averroes: Unity of the Material Intellect and the Preservation of Universality

Averroes holds that intelligibles in act cannot exist in particular human beings without being compromised in their very nature. As material entities, human individuals are *thises* (*hecceitas*), that is, individuated beings whose cognitive faculties are corruptible and particularized. If an intelligible in act were to exist within such a subject, it would cease to be universal and become a particular cognitive event. Consequently, Averroes posits the existence of a single, immaterial, and eternal Material Intellect that serves as the locus of all intelligibles in act (Taylor, 1999, pp. 160–167).

In Averroes' view, human beings contribute to intellection by providing *intentiones distinctae*—denuded images and intentions—through the cogitative faculty, which are then illuminated by the Agent Intellect and realized as intelligibles in the Material Intellect. These intelligibles do not reside in the soul but are *referred to* by the individual through an operational link. Scientific knowledge, then, becomes possible because all humans refer to the same intelligibles in act housed in a common intellect, thus ensuring *intersubjectivity*, semantic stability, and the possibility of a unified science (Taylor, 1999, pp. 162–164).

Averroes' metaphysical framework accords primacy to the *univocity* (*univocitas*) and *unity* (*unitas*) of the object of knowledge, rather than to the psychological immediacy or subjective possession of intellectual content. In his view, the philosophical and scientific value of knowledge does not derive from its being “owned” by an individual consciousness, but from the preservation of its pure, abstract, and non-particular form. Such a form must be safeguarded from the contingencies of individual cognition and maintained within a single, shared *intellectual substrate* (*substratum intellectivum commune*) that is accessible to all rational agents (Averroes, *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima*, III, comm. 5; Davidson, 1992, pp. 332–333). Within this model, the unity of the *Material Intellect* (*intellectus materialis*) is a necessary condition for the continuity and universality of knowledge. Were universal concepts (*intellecta universalia*) to exist ontologically within individual human souls, they would inevitably acquire individuating features, thereby losing the universality essential to scientific knowledge (Taylor, 1999, pp. 160–167). For Averroes, epistemic reliability is secured precisely by ensuring that intelligibles in act are preserved on a supra-individual

plane—in the single, eternal intellect in which all human beings naturally and operationally participate.

This position stands in deliberate contrast to Aquinas' thesis that knowledge cannot exist apart from the knower, and that the form of the known must be immanent in the intellect of the knowing subject (*De Unitate Intellectus*, cap. 3–4; Aquinas, 1993). For Averroes, what matters is not the locus of possession but the maintenance of intelligible content in a stable, unchanging form within a common intellectual repository. His model may thus be interpreted as an attempt to transcend the limitations of individual consciousness by grounding knowledge in a transpersonal intellectual order, thereby guaranteeing both its intersubjectivity (von Kügelgen, 1994) and the universal validity of scientific discourse.

#### **4.2. Aquinas: Multiplicity of Intellects and the Immanence of the Intelligible**

In direct opposition to Averroes' insistence on the singularity of the Material Intellect, Aquinas maintains that one and the same intelligible species can exist in a multiplicity of individual intellects without any diminution of its universality. Once a universal concept or essence—such as *humanitas*—has been abstracted from material conditions through the operation of an individual's Agent Intellect (*intellectus agens*), it may be present simultaneously in several distinct human souls without thereby becoming particularized. For Aquinas, universality is not endangered by numerical multiplication, provided that the form remains abstract, immaterial, and thus free from the individuating conditions of matter (ST I, q. 76, a. 2). This conviction rests on a central Thomistic axiom: *quidquid recipitur in aliquo, recipitur ad modum recipientis*—"what is received in a subject is received according to the mode of the receiver" (ST I, q. 84, a. 1). Since the human intellect, in its act of understanding, is itself immaterial, the forms it receives are retained in an immaterial and therefore universal mode. The numerical plurality of intellects does not fracture the unity of the form, because the mode of reception preserves its universal character across individual cognitive acts.

In Aquinas' anthropology, the intellect is an intrinsic faculty of the individual rational soul (*anima rationalis*), which is both subsistent and incorruptible. Consequently, the act of understanding must be immanent to the very subject who understands. To deny this would entail positing a dualism between the individual and the intellect—an arrangement that Aquinas sees as incompatible with Aristotelian hylomorphism, which defines the human being as a substantial unity of form and matter. Moreover, such a dualism would undermine the theological anthropology of Christian doctrine, which insists on the unity and personal immortality of the



rational soul as the subject of knowledge, moral responsibility, and eschatological destiny (Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus*, cap. 3–4).

From this perspective, Aquinas’ rejection of the Averroist model is not merely a technical dispute over the mechanics of abstraction, but a principled defense of a metaphysical and theological vision in which intellectual activity is inseparable from the personal identity and ontological integrity of the human being.

#### 4.3. Consequences for the Nature of Science and Intersubjectivity

The divergence in metaphysical commitments between Averroes and Aquinas yields profound consequences for their respective theories of science (*scientia*). For Averroes, the very possibility of scientific knowledge is grounded in the ontological unity of the intelligibles in act (*intellecta in actu*). In his framework, there must exist a single, non-particular referent for every universal concept employed in demonstration and rational discourse. This unity of reference ensures that the propositions of science retain the same meaning for all who engage in them, thereby securing the conditions for intersubjective verification and the universality of demonstrative reasoning. If multiple, ontologically distinct intellects were to contain what purported to be “the same” intelligible, the result, according to Averroes, would be either epistemic fragmentation—where different minds hold distinct but merely similar concepts—or a regress of the type exemplified by the Platonic “Third Man Argument” (*tritos anthrōpos*), in which a further universal would be required to mediate between each instantiation of the concept (Taylor, 1999, pp. 165–167; cf. Aristotle, *Parmenides* 132a–b).

Aquinas, by contrast, locates the unity of science not in the numerical identity of the intellect that houses the intelligible, but in the ontological stability of the *essentia* or *forma* that is abstracted by multiple intellects. For him, so long as the universal form remains the same in nature—immaterial, abstract, and free from individuating conditions—it can be possessed simultaneously by a plurality of minds without incurring contradiction or loss of universality. The multiplicity of intellects does not threaten the unity of science because the nature grasped is one, even if it exists in many as a species in multiple subjects.

This approach allows Aquinas to preserve the individuality of intellectual acts—each act being proper to the knower—while simultaneously affirming the shared rationality necessary for common discourse and scientific collaboration. In doing so, he constructs a framework that aligns closely with Christian theological commitments to personal agency, moral accountability, and the eschatological destiny of the individual soul. The Thomistic

model thus reconciles the universality of scientific truth with the personalist conception of the human intellect, thereby resisting the transpersonal epistemology characteristic of the Averroist tradition.

#### 4.4. Philosophical Stakes

In the final analysis, the dispute between Averroes and Aquinas discloses two fundamentally divergent models of human cognition, each grounded in distinct metaphysical and anthropological premises (Toktas, 2003). On the one hand, Averroes advances a *transpersonal* and *referential* conception of knowledge, in which intellectual content is housed in an ontologically external and singular Material Intellect. In this model, the individual human being participates in intellection not by personally possessing the intelligible in act, but by referring to and operationally engaging with a universal repository of forms. On the other hand, Aquinas articulates a *personal* and *possessive* model, wherein knowledge is rooted in the immanent faculties of the individual rational soul. Here, the act of understanding is inseparable from the knower's own intellect, ensuring that the possession of intelligibles is intrinsic to the subject's cognitive and moral identity. These two models are not merely contradictory propositions competing for logical supremacy; rather, they represent differing philosophical priorities and distinct strategies for resolving the tension between the universality of knowledge and the individuality of the knower. Averroes' framework is shaped by a commitment to preserving the metaphysical conditions necessary for the possibility of *universal science*—conditions that require a single, non-particular locus for intelligibles in act to guarantee semantic stability and intersubjective validity. Aquinas' account, by contrast, is oriented toward safeguarding the *psychological* and *theological* coherence of human understanding, ensuring that intellectual activity is consonant with Aristotelianhylomorphism and the Christian doctrines of personal agency, moral responsibility, and the immortality of the soul (Basdemir, 2003).

In this light, the *intelligible in act* (*intellectum in actu*) functions as more than a technical point of philosophical psychology; it becomes a test case for broader commitments concerning the nature of universals, the ontology of the intellect, and the relationship between the human person and truth itself. The debate thus reveals not only a medieval controversy over Aristotle's legacy, but also an enduring fault line in the philosophy of mind—between theories that privilege the transpersonal unity of reason and those that insist on its personal embodiment.

#### 5. Evaluation of Aquinas' Refutation

Although Thomas Aquinas' *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas* has long been regarded in the scholastic tradition as a decisive and methodologically rigorous critique of Averroes' doctrine of the unity of the intellect, closer philosophical scrutiny suggests that its argumentative force is qualified by a fundamental limitation: the validity of Aquinas' refutation rests upon premises and conceptual commitments that Averroes himself does not acknowledge. When evaluated against the internal logic of Averroes' own system, the Thomistic objections cannot be said to engage him on his own philosophical terms.

Modern reassessments of this medieval controversy—most notably by Richard C. Taylor (1999), Bernard Carlos Bazan (1981), and Deborah Black (1993)—have underscored that the purported “demolition” of Averroes' position is, in fact, contingent upon a metaphysical and epistemological framework extrinsic to his thought. Aquinas' critique presupposes, for example, the possibility that intelligibles in act may exist simultaneously in multiple human intellects without forfeiting their universality, and the necessity that such intelligibles be ontologically immanent in the individual soul for genuine knowledge to occur. These assumptions, deeply embedded in Aquinas' hylomorphic anthropology and theological commitments, stand in direct contrast to Averroes' insistence on the transpersonal unity of the Material Intellect as the sole locus of universal forms. From this perspective, the celebrated Thomistic refutation operates less as a direct disproof of Averroes' doctrine than as the presentation of a rival epistemological and metaphysical paradigm—one that is persuasive only if its underlying premises are granted, but which Averroes himself would reject as incompatible with the very conditions necessary, in his view, for the universality and stability of scientific knowledge.

Bazan (1981) argues that Aquinas' critique rests on a fundamental misreading of Averroes' notion of the *intellectum speculativum*. Aquinas interprets this as equivalent to his own concept of the *species intelligibilis*, that is, a species present in the individual intellect as the formal principle of understanding. However, in Averroes' psychology, *speculative intelligibles* are not individuated forms internal to the human soul but are eternal intelligibles in act that exist only in the separate Material Intellect (Bazan, 1981, p. 432; cf. Taylor, 1999, pp. 150–151). Because of this categorical misalignment, Aquinas' arguments—though logically valid within his own framework—do not directly engage Averroes' position. As Bazan concludes, while Aquinas may succeed in undermining a version of Averroism reconstructed on Thomistic grounds, he fails to dismantle Averroes' actual philosophical system.

Deborah Black (1993) extends this critique by providing a more nuanced analysis of Averroes' psychological model, especially in relation to self-awareness and intellectual agency. She argues that Aquinas' refutation presupposes a conception of epistemic ownership—that understanding must occur *in* the individual subject—which is alien to Averroes' framework. Averroes conceives intellection not as the possession of a form by a subject, but as the operation of a universal intellect in cooperation with the faculties of imagination and cogitation (Black, 1993, pp. 366–379).

In this light, the proposition *homo intelligit* (man understands) becomes ambiguous. For Averroes, the human being contributes materially to the act of understanding by preparing the phantasms and intentions, but the formal act of intellection occurs in the separate Material Intellect. Thus, the claim that Aquinas refutes—that the human being does not understand—is based on an equivocation in the notion of *understanding*. Black shows that, within Averroes' own system, this distinction is both coherent and necessary.

Richard C. Taylor synthesizes these perspectives by emphasizing the structural divergence between the two thinkers. Aquinas and Averroes operate within different philosophical architectures—different metaphysical starting points, different definitions of the intellect, and different criteria for what constitutes knowledge. As Taylor (1999, p. 175) puts it:

“The positions of Averroes and Aquinas diverge because of different philosophical roads taken along the way, particularly with respect to the nature of the rational soul and the nature of the intelligible in act.”

Thus, Aquinas' refutation succeeds only if one adopts his assumptions: that intelligibles in act can exist in multiple minds, that the intellect must be part of the human soul, and that personal cognition is essential for moral agency. But if one adopts Averroes' premises—especially the requirement for a single repository of universal forms to secure the unity of science—then the logic of Aquinas' critique becomes less compelling.

The reassessment of Aquinas' critique has broader implications. It cautions against the temptation to judge philosophical systems by external standards without acknowledging their internal coherence. Moreover, it invites renewed attention to Averroes' legacy, not merely as a foil for scholastic realism, but as a serious and systematic thinker whose theory of intellect remains relevant to contemporary debates in the philosophy of mind and the foundations of knowledge.

Averroes' insistence on the necessity of a unified intellectual referent for universal knowledge may be seen as a precursor to modern concerns about intersubjectivity and the conditions for objectivity. Aquinas' emphasis on the individuality of intellectual acts resonates with later developments in personalist and existentialist thought. Each thinker, therefore, articulates a vision of human cognition that continues to inform divergent paths in philosophical anthropology.

## 6. Conclusion

The intellectual conflict between Averroes and Aquinas over the nature of human understanding reveals more than a simple disagreement on Aristotelian psychology; it illustrates a profound divergence in metaphysical commitments and conceptions of knowledge. Averroes' doctrine of a single, separate Material Intellect emerges from his dedication to preserving the universality and objectivity of scientific knowledge. In contrast, Aquinas defends the multiplicity of human intellects in order to safeguard personal cognition, moral responsibility, and theological anthropology. Throughout this article, it has been shown that Aquinas' refutation of Averroes, though rhetorically powerful and theologically motivated, does not succeed on Averroes' own philosophical terms. Contemporary scholarship, particularly the contributions of Bazan, Black, and Taylor, has demonstrated that Aquinas' critique relies on principles that Averroes explicitly rejects—most notably the assumption that intelligibles in act can be multiplied across distinct intellects without loss of universality. Aquinas thus offers not so much a direct refutation as an alternative epistemological vision grounded in his own theological and metaphysical system.

Averroes' position, though often marginalized in the Christian West, anticipates later philosophical concerns regarding intersubjectivity, the unity of scientific discourse, and the transpersonal structure of reason. His emphasis on the externality of the intellect and the referential nature of thought invites renewed attention in light of contemporary discussions in philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Likewise, Aquinas' insistence on the personal interiority of intellectual acts continues to resonate with traditions that emphasize human individuality, moral autonomy, and spiritual unity.

In the end, the confrontation between Averroes and Aquinas should not be seen as a matter of victory or defeat, but rather as a productive dialectic between two coherent yet incompatible frameworks. Each thinker, working within the bounds of Aristotelian thought yet extending it in divergent directions, articulates a powerful vision of what it means to know, to

think, and to be human. Acknowledging the internal consistency of both systems, as well as their philosophical depth, allows us not only to better understand the medieval legacy, but also to reframe ongoing questions about the nature of reason, the structure of the intellect, and the universality of truth.

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