

A Less Studied Averroistic Controversy

The Wide Rejection of Averroes' Agent Sense in the 13th Century

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Abstract: In his *Long Commentary on the De anima*, Averroes tentatively argues that, just as Aristotle suggests a so-called “agent intellect”, we should also posit an analogous “agent sense”. In this paper, I survey the surprisingly wide and varied rejection of this Averroist notion in the (mid to late) 13th century, prior to its infamous reception in the early 14th century by Jean of Jandun. This survey includes those who endorse a more passive theory of sensation, on seemingly Aristotelian grounds, such as the influential Dominican Albert the Great, but also those who, on more Augustinian grounds, endorse their own active theory of sensation, such as the radical Augustinian Franciscan Peter John Olivi and the more moderate Augustinian Giles of Rome. As I explain, each of these figures have their own peculiar points of overlap and contrast in how they object to an agent sense and how they even conceive of such a power. Albert considers two different interpretations: one tied to an early 13th century theory of light, which seemingly puts the agent sense outside of the soul; the other tied to Augustine, which puts the agent sense in the soul. Nevertheless, Albert objects to both views on philosophical grounds. Olivi, in contrast, champions his own Augustinian active account of sensation but objects to an account like that of Averroes, which he more clearly differentiates. Giles, with perhaps the most nuance, returns to Albert's two interpretations and partially defends both views philosophically but objects to calling either such external or

internal agent of sensation an (Averroist) “agent sense”; such an agent is either not a sense or at least not what Averroes intended. In contrast, in the early 14th century, Jandun explicitly defends Averroes’ agent sense and attempts to defend it on equally Augustinian grounds.

Keywords: Averroes, Latin Averroism, Augustinianism, Sensation, Active Cognition, Theories of Light.