Born in Andalusia in 1126, Averroes (or Ibn Rushd) is generally considered one of the most influential Arabic classical philosophers, and his impact on Western thought, through the interpretations of Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and others, can hardly be overestimated. Although Averroes wrote extensively in the fields of religious law (Bidayat al-Mujtahid wa Nihayat al-Muqtasad), philosophy (The Incoherence of the Incoherence) and their relationship (Decisive Treatise), his nickname, the Great Commentator, is a result of Averroes’ prolific commentaries on Greek philosophy, and particularly the works of Aristotle. The date of completion of Averroes’ Long Commentary is, although debatable, usually given at around 1186 C.E., and while its chronological relationship to the Short and Middle Commentaries (and therefore status as Averroes’ ‘final opinion’ on the De Anima) is debatable, the Long Commentary certainly presents Averroes’ most detailed examination of the De Anima. In form, it is basically a line-by-line exegesis, with Averroes reproducing Aristotle’s work and then proceeding to provide explanation, extension, and interpretation. Averroes’ Long Commentary is key to tracing how Averroes interpreted Aristotle’s work on the soul and how his own concept of the soul developed from his reading of Aristotle.

The current translation of Averroes’ Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle by Richard C. Taylor is a new and important resource for coming to grips with this difficult segment of Averroes’ work. An impressive scholar of Averroes whose publications have included examinations of Averroes’ reception by Aquinas and his discussion of the relationship between philosophers and religious law, Taylor’s extensive introduction to this new translation clearly expresses his desire to bring together numerous complex strands of scholarship on Averroes. The scholar wishing to study the
work of Averroes, its historical reception, and interpretation, is often left surrounded by unsteady stacks of unwieldy reference materials – including but not limited to multiple manuscripts in Latin and Hebrew, different versions of the Arabic fragments, and the limited translations into English and French that have been made available since F. Stuart Crawford’s 1953 translation of the Latin manuscript. While any study of Averroes still requires copious research, Taylor does an admirable job of laying out how Averroes’ view changes over the course of his three commentaries on the *De Anima*, as well as pointing out the particular points where Averroes seems to have revised his own views. Although there is still a great deal of room for debate on the chronological and philosophical relationship between these three commentaries, Taylor’s introduction provides a coherent and informative reading of that relationship, one that makes possible a far more organized approach to researching this text.

The format of this edition in itself (while challenging) is immensely useful and does much to mitigate the initial barriers to research posed by the 1954 translation of the *Long Commentary*. Each portion of Aristotle analyzed by Averroes is reproduced (with footnotes to indicate any significant portions of the original that Averroes does not discuss) and followed by Averroes’ analysis. What is unique about what Taylor and Druart have put together are the extensive footnotes accompanying each passage which reproduce Arabic fragments and particularly relevant Latin passages, identify Averroes’ source material, note particularly important interpretations of these works by both Arabic and Christian thinkers, and track differences between available manuscripts. In addition, Taylor and Druart supply an extensive bibliography invaluable to research on Averroes. The primary source bibliography includes information on editions of the majority of Averroes’ works, as well as the works of those who influenced or were influenced by Averroes. The secondary source bibliography offers a wide range of articles on Averroes and Aristotle and includes well-known and established sources as well as more recent work.
This edition is not an easy text to read – which is in no way a criticism of this work. Averroes’ text itself is complicated, and any version of the text that makes it ‘easy’ to read would probably be guilty of over-simplification. Too often Averroes’ Commentaries on Aristotle are read as simple exegesis, but they are far more important than that. The Long Commentaries, where Averroes always keeps Aristotle’s text in sight, is where some of Averroes’ most subtle and interesting departures from Aristotle can be traced. Taylor’s new edition of the Long Commentary is an invaluable tool for parsing some of the more subtle ways that the Great Commentator differed from his source.

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