

# ON THE SUPPOSED “AUGUSTINISME AVICENNISANT” OF DOMINICUS GUNDISSALINUS<sup>1</sup>

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**SÍNTESE** – A partir da noção gilsoniana de ‘agostinismo avicenisante’, procura-se mostrar que o pensamento filosófico de Gundissalino é, sim, devedor de Avicenna, mas que a principal fonte cristã que o orienta não é propriamente Agostinho, mas Boécio. Para tanto são analisados três tópicos da obra de Gundissalino referentes às ciências: o objeto delas, o caráter axiomático e o método.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** – Gundissalino. Agostinismo avicenisante. Recepção do pensamento árabe. Boécio. Noção medieval de ciência.

**ABSTRACT** – Departing from Gilson’s conception of “avicennisant augustinism”, the author shows that the philosophical thought of Gundissalino pays debt to Avicenna, although his main christian orientation is not Augustine, but Boethius. In this sense, three aspects of Gundissalino’s work about the sciences have been analysed: their object, their axiomatic character and their method.

**KEY WORDS** – Gundissalino. Avicennisant augustinism. Reception of arabian philosophical tradition. Boethius. Mediaeval concept of science.

## Introduction

Although I know that labelling is quite a dangerous business in the history of philosophy, what I am going to do in this paper is precisely to propose a new label for the philosophy of Dominic Gundissalino, one of the most important of the Toledan translators in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Actually I am not the first in doing so, for already in 1930 Étienne Gilson coined the expression of an “Augustinisme avicennisant” to characterize the philosophical works of the archdeacon of

<sup>1</sup> The following article develops some considerations that were originally presented at the Warburg Institute, London, on the occasion of the International Workshop “Philosophia: Shifts in Content and Method between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries” on the 1<sup>st</sup> of december 2000 – I am very indebted to Tony Caroll, S.J. for revising the English text of this article.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on the life and works of the archdeacon of Cuéllar see my article s.v. Dominic Gundissalino in: *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, XVII (2000). On the recent polemic concerning Gundissalino’s identity see Alexander Fidora and M.<sup>o</sup> Jesús Soto Bruna, “Dominicus ou Dominus Gundisalvi” – Algunas observaciones sobre un reciente artículo de Adeline Rucquoi”, in: *Estudios eclesiásticos* 76 (2001), pp. 467-473.

Cuéllar.<sup>3</sup> Very soon, this expression found its way into the major manuals of the history of philosophy serving not only to denominate the philosophy of Dominicus Gundissalinus but also a much broader trend in medieval philosophy. Nonetheless, I am not very convinced that the “Augustinisme avicennisant” is an adequate description of Gundissalinus’ philosophy.<sup>4</sup> What I want to take from Gilson’s label is the attribute “avicennisant”, but I shall refuse his characterisation as “Augustinisme” and will argue instead for a “Boethianism” – thus what I shall propose here is an “avicennizing Boethianism”! In combining Boethius and Avicenna, I share Gilson’s fundamental intuition that the archdeacon’s philosophy is defined essentially by his constant effort to connect his own Latin-Christian tradition with the newly received Arabic texts. However, differing from Gilson, I think, that the integrative figure that allows him to make such a connection is not Augustine, but rather Boethius. In order to show this, I will now give three examples, which shall make clear how in the works of Gundissalinus it is Boethius who prepares the reception of the Arabic texts and how he is, so to speak, the point where the Arabic texts can lock onto. I am aware that these three examples are not an exhaustive proof for my thesis, but I hope they will be convincing at least to some extent.

### The objects of the sciences

Let me start with an example taken from his major work: the famous tractate *De divisione philosophiae* where Gundissalinus tries to reorganize the traditional *ordo scientiarum* in the light of the Arabic philosophy. Now, there is no single quotation of Augustine in the entire work, but instead, right at the beginning, we find an explicit reference to Boethius, which reads as follows:

“Et ob hoc dicit Boethius, quod physica est inabstracta et cum motu, mathematica abstracta et cum motu, theologia vero abstracta et sine motu.”<sup>5</sup>

This quotation, which Gundissalinus picks up several times in his work, makes reference to Boethius’ classification of the sciences according to their objects in his *De Trinitate*:

“Nam cum tres sint speculativae partes, *naturalis*, in motu inabstracta *anypexairetos* (considerat enim corporum formas cum materia, quae a corporibus actu separari non possunt [...]), *mathematica*, sine motu inabstracta (haec enim formas corporum speculatur sine materia ac per hoc sine motu, quae formae cum in materia sint, ab his sepa-

<sup>3</sup> See Étienne Gilson, “Les sources gréco-arabes de l’augustinisme avicennisant”, in: *Archives d’Histoire doctrinale et littéraire de Moyen Âge* 4 (1929-1930), pp. 5-149, esp. p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> The inadequacy of this concept has also been pointed out by Miguel Cruz Hernández; see his prologue to Noboru Kinoshita, *El pensamiento filosófico de Domingo Gundisalvo*, Salamanca 1988, pp. 15-16.

<sup>5</sup> Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, ed. Ludwig Baur, Münster 1903, p. 15.



rari non possunt), *theologica*, sine motu abstracta atque separabilis (nam dei substantia et materia et motu caret) [...]”<sup>6</sup>

This paragraph from Boethius' *De Trinitate* had been the subject of an intense discussion in the Chartrian milieu of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was above all the definition of the mathematical objects as *inabstracta* which kept the Chartrian masters busy, for Boethius says that those objects are neither abstract nor separable but nevertheless they are considered without matter. Yet, this is precisely what we understand by abstraction! The explanation of this quite puzzling assertion drove the Chartrian masters to such somewhat paradox formulations as that of saying that the objects of mathematics are not abstract (*abstracta*) but are considered abstractly (*abstracte*). This reveals a twofold use of the notion of abstraction which as an adverb would be an epistemological concept while as an adjective (or a noun) would be an ontological notion. In my opinion, this confusion results from the fact that Boethius, at least in this passage, has no epistemological concept of abstraction. So when he speaks of “abstract” or “separable” he is thinking in purely ontological terms.

But let us come back to our central issue: Dominicus Gundissalinus. Does he really quote Boethius classification of the objects of the sciences *au pied de la lettre*? The answer is no, for in truth he corrects Boethius by inverting his very definition of mathematics: the objects of mathematics are not *sine motu inabstracta* as Boethius tells, but for Gundissalinus they are *abstracta et cum motu*. This is an important correction of the Boethian text and one may ask oneself: why does Gundissalinus dare to do so? In my opinion, the answer to this question has to do with Avicenna: only a few lines before correcting Boethius, Gundissalinus paraphrases a passage from the first part of Avicenna's *Book of healing*, the *Kitab al-Shifa*:

“[...] scilicet aut speculatio de hiis, quae non sunt separata a suis materiis nec in esse nec in intellectu; aut est speculatio de hiis, quae sunt separata a materia in intellectu, non in esse; aut speculatio de hiis, quae sunt separata a materia in esse et in intellectu.”<sup>7</sup>

In this paragraph there is a clear distinction between ontological and epistemological separation, and from the following passages one can see that Gundissalinus introduces the notion of separation for the ontological dimension, while abstraction is reserved for the domain of epistemology. Later in his text, the epistemological concept of abstraction becomes the subject of a detailed analysis

<sup>6</sup> H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester, *Boethius: Tractates. The Consolation of Philosophy*, Cambridge (Ma.), Loeb 1997<sup>12</sup>, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, ed. cit., p. 14. – Compare with this Avicenna, *Opera*, Venetiis 1508, (repr. Frankfurt am Main 1961), fol. 2rb.: “Partes ergo scientiarum sunt aut speculatio de concipiendo ea quae sunt cum hoc quod habent in motu esse et existentiam et pendent ex materiis propriarum specierum, aut speculatio secundum quod sunt separata ab his in intellectu tantum, aut secundum quod sunt separata ab his in esse et intellectu. Prima autem pars divisionis est scientia naturalis. Secunda est disciplinalis [...] Pars vero tertia est scientia divina.”

which is once again clearly inspired by Avicenna and the different degrees of abstraction he proposes.

So if we turn now to the question why Gundissalinus corrects Boethius the answer I suggest is that he does so because, other than Boethius, he disposes not only of an ontological notion of separation, but also of a very elaborated epistemological concept of abstraction which he takes precisely from Avicenna. So one can say that Gundissalinus starts with Boethius and the problems he encounters in his own Latin-Christian tradition in order to transcend this perspective with the help of Avicenna and Arabic philosophy. So much for the first example for what I would like to call the "avicennizing Boethianism" of Gundissalinus.<sup>8</sup>

### The axiomatic character of the sciences

The second example is also taken from his *De divisione philosophiae*, and more precisely from the chapter on mathematics. In this we find a general discussion of *demonstratio* and the syllogism which according to Gundissalinus are the instruments of mathematics *par excellence*. To him, the basis for a syllogism are *propositiones primae* and *verae*, some of them being *sensibilia* and some *intelligibilia*. The *intelligibilia* in turn are divided in two classes.

"[...] alia intelligibilia [sunt] ut: omne totum maius est parte sua, et similia. Huiusmodi autem intelligibilium alia sunt prima, alia secunda.

Quae cum primo audiuntur, statim conceduntur. Prima sunt, quae syllogismorum conclusiones esse non possunt, nulla enim sunt nociora eis, et ideo dicuntur per se nota, quia non possunt fieri nota per alia; unde apellantur communes animi conceptiones, quas quisque cum audit approbat."<sup>9</sup>

This quotation points to the famous definition of the *communes animi conceptiones* in Boethius' *De hebdomadibus*. Actually in his *De hebdomadibus* Boethius distinguishes two sorts of such axioms: those being known by every one and those being accessible only for the learned:

"Communis animi conceptio est enuntiatio quam quisque probat auditam. Harum duplex modus est. Nam una ita communis est, ut omnium sit hominum, veluti si hanc proponas: 'Si duobus aequalibus aequalia auferas, quae relinquuntur aequalia esse,' nullus id intelligens neget. Alia vero est doctorum tantum, quae tamen ex talibus communibus animi conceptionibus venit, ut est: 'Quae incorporalia sunt, in loco non esse,' et cetera; quae non vulgus sed docti comprobant."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed account on this subject see my article "Die Rezeption der boethianischen Wissenschaftseinteilung bei Dominicus Gundissalinus", in: Rainer Berndt et. al. (eds.), *'Scientia' und 'Disciplina' im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert – Wissenstheorie und Wissenschaftspraxis im Wandel*, Berlin 2001, pp. 178-191.

<sup>9</sup> Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, ed. cit., p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Boethius, *op. cit.*, p. 40.



This distinction is quite obscure, for what does it mean that there are common notions which are reserved only to the happy few? Clarendon of Arras, although he discusses at length the corresponding example of such a, so to say, non-common common notion, does not explain why they are only known by the *doctores*. Yet, his master Thierry of Chartres tries to shed some light on this question by saying that they are *per se notae* insofar as they are deduced from *per se notae* notions. So it is the capacity to operate this deduction which would mark the difference between the *vulgus* and the learned man.

Now Gundissalinus can even make one step more, because apparently he realized without too much difficulty, that the Boethian *communis animi conceptio* is exactly the same as the *koine ennoiai* in Euclid's *Elements*. One can see this in the fact that in order to illustrate the *communis animi conceptio* he does not quote the Boethian example, i.e. axiom III of the *Elements*, but axiom IX. So he was aware that the axioms referred to Euclid. This is already an interesting recognition, for it is not at all obvious that the *communis animi conceptio* is the same as the axioms. As Charles Burnett has pointed out, Adelard of Bath in Version I of his translation of the *Elements*, translates the *koine ennoiai* as *communes scientiae*.<sup>11</sup> But what is more important for our present purpose is that in realizing the Euclidean provenance of the *communes animi conceptiones* Gundissalinus also discovers new possibilities to explain what is meant by the common notions accessible only for the learned:

"Secunda vero intelligibilia sunt, quae in demonstrationibus concluduntur, qualia sunt theoremata Euclidis, quae postquam probantur per prima, in demonstratione assumentur, et ideo non sunt per se nota, quia non fiunt nota per se, sed per alia."<sup>12</sup>

With this identification, Gundissalinus gives a clear answer to the nature and status of the non-common common notions, insofar as they are identified with Euclid's *theoremata*. So what has happened here is that a difficult passage from Boethius has been enlightened on the basis of the Arabic Euclid, which in turn can be understood as a continuation of the existing Latin-Christian discussions. In this example there is of course no Avicennian influence, but it shows, how, once again, Boethius is the point of depart for the reception and integration of new texts translated from the Arabic.

## The methods of the sciences

My third and last example concerns the methodology of the sciences. In his cosmological tractate *De processione mundi* the archdeacon starts with the following observation:

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<sup>11</sup> See Charles Burnett, "The Latin and Arabic Influences on the Vocabulary Concerning Demonstrative Argument in the Versions of Euclid's *Elements* associated with Adelard of Bath", in: Jacqueline Hamesse (ed.), *Aux origines du lexique philosophique européen. L'influence de la 'latinitas'*, Louvain 1997, pp. 117-135.

<sup>12</sup> Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, ed. cit., p. 32.

"Unde dicitur, quod in naturalibus rationaliter, in mathematicis disciplinaliter, in theologicis intelligentialiter versari oportet."<sup>13</sup>

This is quite clearly a quotation taken from the very same passage of the *De Trinitate* as was the first example. In Boethius this text reads as follows:

In naturalibus igitur rationabiliter, in mathematicis disciplinaliter, in divinis intellectualiter versari oportebit.<sup>14</sup>

Like Boethius' remarks on the classification of the sciences according to their objects and their axiomatic character, this methodology had been vividly discussed by the Chartrian masters. Thus Thierry of Chartres and Clarembald of Arras have tried to establish a correspondence between the three methods mentioned by Boethius, i.e. *rationaliter*, *disciplinaliter* and *intellectualiter*, and the powers of the soul, i.e. *ratio*, *intellectus* and *intelligentia*. So they identify *ratio* with the method of physics (*rationaliter*), *intellectus* with that of mathematics (*disciplinaliter*) and *intellectibilitas* or *intelligentia* with that of divine science (*intellectualiter*). But their correspondence is not really conclusive, for it accepts that although *intellectus* is the power of mathematical knowledge it is also the power from which derives the denomination for the method of divine science (*intellectualiter*). Thus the difference of the methods of mathematics and divine science remains quite vague.

Now how does Gundissalinus tackle this problem inherent in the Boethian distinction? In fact, he proceeds quite similarly to the first example, that is to say, he simply corrects Boethius by characterizing the mathematical method not as *intellectualiter* but as *intelligentialiter*. Thus he can go on to assign *ratio* to physics, *intellectus* to mathematics and *intelligentia* to divine science without getting confronted with the incoherencies of his Chartrian colleagues. Actually in doing so he is correcting Boethius with Boethius himself, because the distinction between *ratio*, *intellectus* and *intelligentia* is taken from Book V of his *Consolatio*. But what is *intelligentia*? Like Boethius, and this is important for what follows, Gundissalinus is convinced that it is a divine power; he even tells us that ultimately it pertains only to God and that we have to try to participate in it.

So much for Gundissalinus' Boethianism but what about the avicennizing elements? Let us consider the following translation by Gundissalinus of Avicenna's *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*:

"[...] anima rationalis cum coniungitur formis aliquo modo coniunctionis, aptatur ut contingant in ea ex luce intelligentiae agentis ipsae formae nudaе ab omni permixtione. Primum autem quod percipit de eis humanus intellectus est id quod de eis est essentiale et accidentale."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De processione mundi*, ed. Georg Bülow, Münster 1925, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Boethius, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> See Avicenna, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, 2 vols., ed. Simone van Riet, Louvain/Leiden 1968/ 1972, vol. I, p. 128.



It is well known that the Arabic theory of the intellect operates with a vast variety of different intellects, potential intellect, actual intellect, agent intellect etc. which are all summarized under the common name of *'aql*. But as one can see from this quotation, Gundissalinus does not translate these terms with the same Latin word. Instead he introduces the fundamental distinction that he has already developed in discussing and correcting Boethius: i.e. that of *intellectus* and *intelligentia*. The consequences of this translation of the agent intellect, *al-'aql al-fa'al*, as *intelligentia*, which is Gundissalinus' standard-translation, is extremely significant. Because with this, the agent intellect, which for Avicenna is different from God as well as from the human intellect, becomes now God himself. Because *intelligentia*, as already mentioned, is divine for Gundissalinus. It is mainly this transformation of the agent intellect becoming God that drove Gilson to speak of an "Augustinisme avicennisant". But I think that there is absolutely no reason to call it "Augustinisme". As I have already tried to show with the other two examples, the most influential Latin-Christian author for Gundissalinus is Boethius; and that includes for this last example.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

This is why I am proposing the label of "avicennizing Boethianism". Yet, this label does not only want to replace one Latin-Christian authority by an other. It also wants to offer a new way of understanding the connection between the Latin-Christian tradition and Arabic philosophy in the work of Gundissalinus. This connection does not consist in Christianising Avicenna and making him consistent with Christian doctrine as one might think from Gilson's remarks. The connection between both is much more complex and intrinsic: In all the three examples that I presented there is a manifest problem at the beginning, something is wrong or difficult to understand with Boethius. And it is not only a particular problem of our archdeacon, but as I hope to have shown with the continuous references to Chartres, the problems are much broader ones. It is in trying to solve these problems that the Chartrean authors have written some of their most valuable pages. And it is also in trying to solve these problems that Gundissalinus receives the Arabic texts and mainly Avicenna, insofar as they propose solutions to the problems inherent in Gundissalinus' own tradition. This is at least the case in my first and second examples; in the third one it is the specific solution to a difficulty in Boethius that leads to a specific understanding of Avicenna. So there is a clear continuity between the Latin-Christian discussions and the reception of Arabic philosophy. This reception does not only start because all of a sudden new texts become available, but because these texts give answers to well known problems – problems and answers which are in fact Aristotelian ones.

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<sup>16</sup> For further discussion on the methods of the sciences in Gundissalinus and Boethius see my article "La metodología de las ciencias según Boecio: su recepción en las obras y traducciones de Domingo Gundisalvo", in: *Revista española de filosofía medieval* 7 (2000), pp. 127-136.

So let me still go one step further and conclude by saying, that pushing Boethius to his limits and connecting him with Avicenna, our Toledan philosopher as well as the Chartrian authors prepares and anticipates in many aspects the rediscovery of Aristotle: the classification of the sciences, their axiomatic character and the noetic powers are only three examples for this, but significant ones I believe!