

## 21

# Giles of Rome on the Errors of the Philosophers

***Here Begin the Errors of the Philosophers Aristotle, Averroës, Avicenna, Algazel, Alkindi, and Rabbi Moses (Maimonides), Compiled by Brother Giles of the Order of St. Augustine***

*And a compilation of Aristotle's errors is placed first.*

### Chapter I

As it is the case that many wrong conclusions follow from one faulty statement, so the Philosopher has drawn many errors from one faulty principle.

1. For he believed nothing to be disposed in some condition in which it previously was not, except it came to be that way through a preceding motion. He held, moreover, that there is no novelty except where there is change, taken properly. Because, therefore, every change taken properly is a terminus of motion, there can be no novelty without a preceding motion. Now from this principle he concluded that motion never began to be; since if motion began, the motion was new. But nothing is new except through some preceding motion. Therefore there was motion before the first motion, which is a contradiction.

2. Further: he erred because he posited time never to have begun. Now time always follows on motion, if, therefore, motion never began, neither did time. Moreover, it seemed to him that the principle of time involved a special difficulty. For since an instant is always the end of the past and the beginning of the future, a first instant cannot be given, because there was a time before every instant, and before any assigned time there was an instant. Time, therefore, did not begin, but is eternal.

3. Further: because of what has already been stated, he was forced to posit a mobile to be eternal and the world to be eternal. For as one cannot give a time without motion, and motion without a mobile, if time and motion are eternal, the mobile will be eternal, and so the world would never begin. All of this is clear from Book VIII of the *Physics*.

4. Further: he was forced to posit the heavens to be ungenerated and incorruptible, and never to have been made but always to have been. For since among the varieties of motion only the circular is continuous – as is clear from Book VIII of the *Physics* – if any motion is eternal, the circular will be eternal. And since circular motion is proper to the heavens – as is shown in Book I *On the Heavens and the Earth* – it then follows that the heavens are uncreated and that they were never made. Moreover, he had a special reason why the heavens never began: because whatever has the power to be forever in the future, always had the power to be in the past. And since the heavens will never cease to be, they did not begin to be.

5. Further: since, according to him, whatever comes about comes from pre-existent matter, he concluded that there could not be another world. Hence, God could not make another world, since this one is constructed from all the matter there is. This error also is found in Book I, *On the Heavens and the Earth*.

6. He held further that generation in this sublunary world would never end, and that it never began. For corruption precedes and follows every generation, and generation precedes and follows every corruption. Because of this, since a corruption has preceded any generation, while some generation has preceded a corruption, it is impossible for generation and corruption to have had a beginning; nor is it possible for them to cease to be, since a corruption follows any generation, and a generation follows any corruption. If, therefore, either generation or corruption were to cease, there would be a generation after the final generation, and a corruption after the final corruption. Moreover, that a corruption precedes and follows generation, he proved by way of motion. For something is not generated except because something is corrupted; and so corruption precedes generation and also follows it, since every generable is corruptible, and every corruptible will be corrupted of necessity. Thus also generation precedes corruption, because nothing is corrupted except it was previously generated; and generation follows because the corruption of one thing is the generation of another. However, this error – that generation and corruption neither begin nor end – can be found in Book I, and more expressly in Book II, *On Generation and Corruption*.

7. Further: since generation in this sublunary world is brought about through the sun, he was forced to maintain that the sun – to quote him – “will never cease to generate plants and animals.” This is clear from Book I, *On Plants*.

8. Further: since, according to his posited principle, there is no novelty without a preceding motion, he erred in maintaining that something new could not proceed immediately from God. This is clear in Book II of his *On Generation and Corruption*, where he says that “the same thing, remaining the same, always makes the same.”

9. Further: he was constrained to deny the resurrection of the dead. That he held it as erroneous that the dead should rise again, is clear from Book I, *On the Soul*. Also, in Book VIII of the *Metaphysics* he held that the dead cannot return to life except through many intermediaries; and if one does return, it does not return numerically the same, because things which have lost substance do not return numerically the same, as is said at the end of Book II, *On Generation and Corruption*.

Now if someone were to wish to excuse Aristotle on the ground that he is speaking in a naturalistic sense, this would not do: because he believed that nothing new could proceed from God immediately, but that every novelty comes about by way of motion and natural operation.

10. Further: since he believed that nothing new could occur except by way of motion and through the operation of nature, he believed – as appears in Book I of the *Physics* where he argues against Anaxagoras – that an intellect which wants to separate passions and accidents

from substance is, to quote him, “an intellect seeking the impossible.” On this account it seems to follow that God cannot make an accident without a subject.

11. Further: since by way of motion the generation of one thing never occurs unless there is the corruption of another; and since one substantial form is never introduced unless another is expelled; and since the matter of all things possessing matter is the same; it follows that there are not more substantial forms in one composite than there are in another. Indeed, to one who would consistently pursue this line of reasoning, it would appear that there is but one substantial form in every composite; and this seems to be the Philosopher’s view. Hence, in Book VII of the *Metaphysics*, in the chapter “On the Unity of Definition,” he holds the parts of a definition not to be one, as he says, “because they are *in* one,” but rather because they *define* one nature.

Now if he means here one composite nature consisting in many forms, then his view can be maintained; but if he means one simple nature, and that there is only one form in such a composite, it is false.

12. Further: he posited that where there is still water, or a sea, at some time it was there dry, and conversely; because time does not cease but is eternal, as is clear from Book I of *Meteors*. Hence, he also had to say, necessarily, that one cannot posit a first man or a first rainfall.

13. Further: since an intelligence is unable to move something unless it is itself actually moving; and since intelligences are posited to be in the best state when they are moving something; he said there were as many angels, or as many intelligences, as there are orbs. This is quite clear from Book XII of the *Metaphysics*.

Divine Scripture, however, contradicts this, saying: “thousands of thousands tended to Him, and ten-thousand times a hundred-thousand stood before Him.”

## Chapter II

### In which the Errors of Aristotle Are Restated In Sum

These, therefore, are all of his errors in sum, namely:

1. That motion did not begin.
2. That time is eternal.
3. That the world did not begin.
4. That the heavens are not created.
5. That God could not make another world.
6. That generation and corruption neither began nor will end.
7. That the sun will always cause generation and corruption in this sublunary world.
8. That nothing new can proceed immediately from God.
9. That the resurrection of the dead is impossible.
10. That God cannot make an accident without a subject.
11. That there is but one substantial form in any composite.
12. That one cannot posit a first man or a first rainfall.
13. That there is no way in which two bodies can be in the same place.
14. That there are as many angels as there are orbs – because from this it follows that there are only 55 or 57.

Now certain men wanted to excuse the Philosopher’s position on the eternity of the world. But this attempt cannot hold up, since he insists upon the aforesaid principle so as to demonstrate philosophical truths. Indeed, he almost never wrote a book of philosophy where he did not employ this principle.

Again, aside from the above-mentioned errors, some men wanted to impute to him the view that God knows nothing outside Himself, so that this sublunary world is not known to Him – citing as reason for this view the words which are found in Book XII of the *Metaphysics*, in the chapter “The Opinion of the Fathers.” But that they do not understand the Philosopher, and that this is not his intention, is clear from what is said in the chapter “On Good Fortune,” where he says that God, known through Himself, is the past and the future. Moreover, other errors, with which we are not concerned as they arise from an improper understanding of Aristotle, are attributed to him.

### Chapter III

#### In which Is Refuted the Statement which Is Fundamental for All the Philosopher’s Errors

Now all of his errors, if one investigates subtly, follow from this position: that *nothing new comes into being except there be a preceding motion*. This is, therefore, false: because God is the First Agent, and being a non-instrumental agent, He will be able to produce a thing without a preceding motion. Now an agent by nature is an instrumental agent; but because it is of the nature of an instrument that it move the moved, motion is of necessity presupposed in its action. The making, therefore, in the production of a first agent can be without such motion. Creation, therefore, is not motion, because motion presupposes a mobile. Creation, in truth, presupposes nothing; nor is creation properly a change, because all change is a terminus of motion; but, as is commonly held, it is a simple procession of things from the first agent. Therefore, whatever is argued by way of motion against the beginning of the world, or against that which is held by faith, is wholly sophistical.

### Chapter IV

#### A Compilation of the Errors of Averroës

Now the Commentator agrees in all the errors of the Philosopher. Indeed, he spoke even more ironically and with greater pertinacity than the Philosopher against those who posited the world to have begun. He is to be argued against incomparably more than against the Philosopher, because he more directly impugns our faith, holding to be false that which could not contain falsity as it is based upon the First Truth.

1. He went beyond the Philosopher’s errors because he scorned all law, as is clear from Book II and XI of the *Metaphysics*, where he mocks the law of the Christians, or our Catholic law, and even the Saracen law, because they too posit the creation of things and that something can be created from nothing. He mocks also in the beginning of Book III of the *Physics*, where he holds that some men, because of the contrary assertion of the laws, are led to deny self-evident principles – as when they deny that nothing can be created out of nothing. Indeed, what is worse, he derisively calls us, and others who hold the law, “talkers,” as if we were babblers and irrational wanderers. And also in Book VIII of the *Physics* he scorns the laws; while the “talkers” in law he calls “willers,” because they assert that something can have being after wholly non-being. Indeed, he calls this dictum “a will,” as if it were arbitrarily established only, and completely lacking in reason. And not only once or twice, but many times in the same Book VIII he exclaims in a similar manner against the laws asserting the creation.

2. He erred further, saying in Book VII of the *Metaphysics* that no immaterial thing transmutes a material thing except through the mediation of an intransmutable body. Because of this, it follows that an angel cannot move one stone here in the sublunary world. In a certain sense this does follow from the Philosopher's position, however the Philosopher did not himself expressly take this position.

3. He erred further, saying in Book XII of the *Metaphysics* that the potency in the production of something could not be in the agent alone, scorning John the Christian who maintained this view. Indeed, Averroës' view is opposed to truth and the Saints, because in made things the whole principle of the made thing lies in the potency of the maker.

4. Further: he erred by saying in the same Book XII that no agent can immediately produce diverse and contrary things. And by saying this he scorns the speakers in the three laws: namely, the law of the Christians, Saracens and Moors – because they all asserted this.

5. Further: he erred, saying in Book XII that all intellectual substances are eternal and pure acts, having no admitted potency. But he was himself constrained by truth to contradict this opinion in Book III of *On the Soul*, where he says that “no form is absolutely free from potency except the first form”; for, as he himself adds, all “other forms are diversified in essence and quiddity.”

6. Further: he erred saying in Book XII that God is neither solicitous, nor does He have care, nor does He provide for individuals existing in the sublunary world. For, as he says, “this is neither permissible to, nor consonant with, Divine Goodness.”

7. He erred further, denying a Trinity to be in God, saying in Book XII that some men “held a Trinity to be in God, but they sought by this device to be evasive and to really say that there are three Gods and one God; still, they don't even know how to be evasive properly, because when substance is numbered, the aggregate will still be one through the one added intention.”

Because of this, according to him, if God were three and one, it would follow that He would be a composite, which is contradictory.

8. Further: he erred because he said that God did not know particulars since they are infinite. This is clear from his comment in the chapter “The Opinion of the Fathers.”

9. Further: he erred because he denied that all which occurs in the sublunary world is guided by Divine Solicitude or Divine Providence. For according to him, some things, as he puts it “occur owing to the necessity of matter” and without the guidance of such Providence.

But this is opposed to the Saints; because nothing that occurs here is completely independent of the aforesaid Guidance, since all that we see here is either brought about, or permitted, by Divine Providence.

10. Further: he erred because he posited that there was numerically one intellect in all. This is clear from Book III of *On the Soul*.

11. Further: since it follows from the position just stated that the intellect is not the form of the body, Averroës therefore concluded in the same Book III that the term “act” is applied equivocally to the intellect and to other forms. Because of this, he was constrained to say that man is not placed in a species through his possession of an intellective soul, but rather through his possession of a sensitive soul.

12. Further: reasoning from this principle, he concluded that from the union of the intellective soul and the body there is not constituted some third thing; and that from such a soul and body there no more arises a unity, than there arises such a unity from the union of the mover of the heavens and the heavens.

## Chapter V In which the Aforesaid Errors Are Restated In Sum

These are all the errors in which the Commentator goes beyond those of the Philosopher:

1. That no law is true, although it may be useful.
2. That an angel can move nothing immediately except it be a heavenly body.
3. That an angel is a pure act.
4. That in no made thing does the whole principle of the making lie in the potency of the maker.
5. That from no agent can there proceed diverse things simultaneously.
6. That God has no providence over some particulars.
7. That there is no trinity in God.
8. That God does not know singulars.
9. That something can proceed from the necessity of matter without the guidance of Divine Providence.
10. That the intellective soul is not multiplied with the multiplication of bodies, but is numerically one.
11. That man is placed in a species by his possession of a sensitive soul.
12. That a thing no more becomes one through the union of the intellective soul and the body, than does such a unity arise from the conjoining of the mover of the heavens and the heavens.

## Chapter VI A Compilation of the Errors of Avicenna

1. Now Avicenna also seems to have erred in that he posited but one form in a composite. This is clear from section II of his *Metaphysics*, in the chapter “Concerning the Division of Corporeal Substances,” where he maintains that the generic form is not made specific by some extrinsic agency – through which is implied that the specific form is not any essence beyond the essence of the generic form.

2. Further: he erred in positing the eternity of motion. Indeed, he held motion to be eternal. Hence, he says in Book IX of his *Metaphysics*, in the chapter “Concerning the Active Property of the First Principle,” that: “it is clear that motion does not become after having not been, except through something that was; and that which was, did not begin to be except through a motion contingent upon that other motion.” Hence, affirming the Philosopher’s fundamental position that nothing is in a new state except through a preceding motion, he held that motion did not begin, because then there would be motion before the first motion.

3. He erred further, maintaining that matter is presupposed in every new production. For this reason he says in the same chapter that “that which was not, cannot be, except it be preceded by receptive matter.” Hence, he denies that something new could begin to be after nothingness, since – as he says himself – in nothingness there can be no “hour of ending, and hour of beginning,” nor indeed, any temporal distinction whatsoever.

4. Further: he maintained that nothing contingent could proceed from a non-contingent God. Hence, he says in the same chapter that if something contingent proceeded immediately from God through His nature, He would be changed in nature; if through His intention, His intention would be changed; and if through His will, His will would be changed.

Indeed, what is worse, he calls heretics all those who say that God precedes creation by a priority of duration, because by saying this, according to him, they deny freedom of will to God, since if God did not immediately produce the creation, He would not have full freedom of action, but rather He was compelled to await the time and the hour to act.

5. Further: he erred in positing the eternity of time. Indeed, motion could not be eternal unless time were eternal. He says, indeed, in the already-cited chapter, that the motion of the heavens has no beginning as respects duration, but rather as respects their having a principal agent. Now as motion of this kind is caused by a soul, as he himself says, and because a soul and a body make an animal, he concluded “that the heavens were an animal obedient to God.”

Now all of the aforesaid errors took their origin in that he did not clearly see the mode in which God acts according to the order of His wisdom. God, indeed, could have made the world prior to when He made it; but that He did not do this was not caused by His awaiting something in the future upon which to initiate His action, but rather because He had arranged it that way according to His wisdom. Nor is it proper for motion to precede in order that something proceed immediately from God, as has been pointed out above in the place where the Philosopher’s views were set forth.

6. Further: he erred in respect of the process of things from the first principle. For not only did he posit the products of the first principle to have eternally proceeded from it, but he also held that from the first principle nothing proceeds immediately except it be numerically one – as the first intelligence. This is clear from Book IX of his *Metaphysics* in the chapter, “Concerning the Order of Intelligences and Souls.” Hence, in the same chapter, he posits that “neither bodies, nor the forms which are the perfection of bodies, are the first effects of the first principle itself.”

7. Further: reasoning from the above, he continued in error, in that he says that the souls of the celestial bodies were produced by intelligences or by angels, and that one intelligence was produced by another.

8. He said further, that the celestial bodies were produced by souls and that they were produced through the mediation of their forms. From this position, it follows that the intelligences are the creators of the celestial souls, and the celestial souls are the creators of bodies, and that the higher intelligence is the creator of the lower intelligence.

9. Further: he held that our souls were produced by the last intelligence, upon which depends the governance of our souls and, consequently, our beatitude. Now this is clearly stated in the afore-mentioned chapter of the above-cited book.

10. He erred further with regard to the animation of the heavens. For he held the heavens to be animated. The soul of the heavens, he said, is not only an appropriate mover, as the Philosopher and the Commentator maintain, but that one thing is produced by the union of the soul of the heavens and the heavens, just as one thing is produced by the union of our soul and our body.

But this is in opposition to Damascene, who says in Book II, Chapter VI, that the heavens are inanimate and insensible.

11. He erred further as regards the giving of forms. For he posited all forms to be from the giver of forms, as from the lowest intelligence. This is clear from that which is said in Book IX of his *Metaphysics*, in the chapter “Concerning the Disposition of Generation of the Elements.”

But this is opposed to Augustine, who held the angels to induce no forms except through the furnishing of semen.

Moreover, he also held that our souls direct matter with respect to the reception of forms, as is clear from what he says in Book VI, *On Natural Things*. He believed enchantment to be true, in that the soul can be active not only in its own body, but also in an alien body.

12. Further: he erred in holding that there could be no evil in the intelligences, contradicting Scripture, where it is written that “in His angels He found depravity.” But that this was his position is clear from what is said in Book IX of his *Metaphysics*, in the chapter, “On Showing how Things Are Contained under Divine Judgment.”

13. He erred further as concerns the Divine Cognition, holding God could not know singulars in their proper form. This is clear from the last chapter in Book VIII of his *Metaphysics*.

14. Further: he erred concerning the Divine Attributes, holding that God’s knowledge, and other of His perfections, are not something to be attributed positively to Him, but are rather to be attributed to Him only by negation.

But this is opposed to the Saint’s way, according to whom such perfections are more truly in God than in us, and that God truly is whatever it is better to be than not to be.

15. He erred further with respect to the number of intelligences, positing there to be as many angels as there are orbs. Hence, he agrees with the Philosopher’s dictum that the angels are about forty in number, since he believed that there were that many orbs. This position is set forth by him in Book IX of the *Metaphysics*, in the chapter, “How Actions Proceed from Higher Principles.”

16. He erred further regarding prophecy. Now he spoke correctly with reference to prophecy when he said that a prophet is nobler than a non-prophet, because the prophet hears Divine Words, and because he sees, or at least can see, “angels transfigured before him in a form which can be seen.” But he spoke badly when he held prophecy to be natural, and because he maintained that prophecy is delivered to us according to the order which our soul has with respect to supercelestial souls and the last intelligence.

17. He erred further with respect to orisons, alms and litanies. He spoke correctly when he maintained such to be of efficacy to man in that God has concern for things; but he strayed badly when he held such things to be subsumed under the order of nature.

This is false, since such things as direct us to supernatural beatitude are subsumed under the order of grace. That this error was deliberate on Avicenna’s part, is clear from Book X of his *Metaphysics* in the chapter “Concerning Aspirations and Orisons.”

18. Further: he erred concerning our beatitude, holding it to depend upon our works. Now from his position it follows that our beatitude consists in the contemplation of the last intelligence, as is clear from Book X of his *Metaphysics*, in the chapter “Concerning the Cult of God and its Utility.”

Still other errors can be imputed to him, but either they take their origin from those cited above, or they are reducible to them.

## Chapter VII

### In which the Afore-Mentioned Errors of Avicenna Are Restated In Sum

These are all the errors of Avicenna:

1. That there is but one substantial form in a composite.
2. That motion is eternal.

3. That nothing comes from nothing.
4. That contingency cannot proceed immediately from the non-contingent.
5. That time never had a beginning.
6. That a plurality of things cannot proceed immediately from the first principle.
7. That from one intelligence, another intelligence either proceeds or is created.
8. That from the intelligences, the souls of the heavens either proceed or are created.
9. That from the soul of the heavens there proceeds the supercelestial bodies.
10. That from the last intelligence, our souls proceed.
11. That a single entity comes about from the union of the soul of the heavens and the heavens, just as from the union of our soul and body.
12. That the forms in this world are induced by the last intelligence and not by proper agents.
13. That bewitchment is something beyond the mere apprehension of the soul.
14. That the soul, through its imagination, is operative in alien bodies.
15. That there cannot be evil in the angels.
16. That God does not know singulars in their proper form.
17. That the attributes of God do not correspond positively to anything.
18. That there are as many intelligences as there are orbs.
19. That prophecy is natural.
20. That alms, litanies and orisons are subsumed under the natural order. On this account Avicenna appears to hold that whatever occurs here in this world, occurs necessarily; and also that he who fully knows the motion of the supercelestial beings, and the order of the spiritual substances, can foretell the future.
21. That our beatitude depends upon our works.
22. That our beatitude consists in the cognition of the last intelligence.