

# A Note on the Title of Walter Burley's *On the Purity of the Art of Logic*

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## I. The Problem

In his 1955 edition of Walter Burley's *De puritate artis logicae* (= *On the Purity of the Art of Logic*), Philotheus Boehner speculated on the odd title of this important work. Here in part is what he says<sup>1</sup>:

Thus far we see that Burleigh wrote a tract on logic after Ockham published his *Summa Logicae*, and called it 'The purity of the art of Logic'. Though it is not stated that he wrote against Ockham, the peculiar title suggests at least that he wrote against Ockham and the 'impurity' brought by Ockham into logic.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Burley (= Burleigh), *Walter Burleigh: De puritate artis logicae tractatus longior With a Revised Edition of the Tractatus Brevior*, Philotheus Boehner, ed. ("Franciscan Institute Publications," Text Series, No. 4; St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1955), p. VIII. This edition supersedes the earlier publication of the *Tractatus brevior* only, in *Walter Burleigh: De puritate artis logicae*, Philotheus Boehner, ed., ("Franciscan Institute Publications," Text Series, No., 1; St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1951). Spade has prepared a complete translation of *De puritate artis logicae* (both the *Tractatus brevior* and the *Tractatus longior*), on the basis of a slightly revised version of Boehner's 1955 text. See *Walter Burley, On the Purity of the Art of Logic: The Shorter and the Longer Treatises*, Paul Vincent Spade, ed., and trans. ("Yale Library of Medieval Philosophy"; New Haven, Conn., 2000).

This attractive hypothesis, that Burley's striking title is to be explained by the fact that the work is an attempt to "purify" the logical art of the Ockhamist accretions it had acquired—to its detriment, in Burley's view—will nevertheless not withstand closer scrutiny. For Burley wrote two versions of the work, a shorter and a longer treatise. While the longer one shows a definite knowledge of and strong reaction to views presented in Ockham's *Summa logicae* (c. 1323), *The Shorter Treatise* betrays no awareness of Ockham whatever.<sup>2</sup> The obvious and most plausible conjecture therefore is that Ockham's *Summa* appeared between the two versions of Burley's work.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, *The Shorter Treatise* already describes itself as "a certain treatise on the purity of the art of logic."<sup>4</sup> If that version of the work was written *before* Ockham's main logical writings, then this phrase, and so the title traditionally given to both versions of the work, can hardly be taken as indicating an attempt to respond to and undo the pernicious effects of those writings, which had not yet appeared.

But the matter does not rest merely on chronology. Even if we allow some leeway in dating the two versions of Burley's work, the main point still stands. For even if Burley did already know something of Ockham and his views when *The Shorter Treatise* was written, the fact that the work goes on for more than

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<sup>2</sup> See Boehner's discussion in the introduction to his edition, *op. cit.*, pp. VII–VIII. For a discussion of the dating of Burley's works, and of the history of the hostility between him and Ockham, see Jennifer Ottman and Rega Wood, "Walter of Burley: His Life and Works," *Vivarium* 37 (1999), pp. 1–23 at pp. 12–14. In his earlier book, *Medieval Logic: An Outline of Its Development from 1250 to c. 1400*, (Manchester, 1952), pp. 84–89, Boehner had suggested that the two versions of the *De puritate* form two parts of one unified work. But by the time of his 1955 edition, he had changed his mind, and for good reason: *The Longer Treatise* does not at all conform to the plan announced at the beginning of *The Shorter Treatise*, but yet quotes verbatim whole sections of the latter. It appears therefore that *The Longer Treatise* is a distinct work, incorporating much previously written material from *The Shorter Treatise*.

<sup>3</sup> Though plausible, the point needs to be considered with some care. The passages of *The Longer Treatise* where Burley seems to show an awareness of Ockham's views all occur in his discussion of the semantic theory of simple supposition. (Spade trans., pp. 86–90, 95–96, 97 [paragraphs (27)–(40), (55), (58), (64)], and the notes there.) While *The Shorter Treatise* was originally intended to include a section on supposition theory, according to the plan announced at the beginning of the work (*ibid.*, p. 3 [paragraphs (1)–(2)]), in fact the treatise breaks off long before reaching that point. Could it be that *The Shorter Treatise* shows no awareness of Ockham's views simply because it was interrupted before it got to them?

<sup>4</sup> "quemdam tractatum de puritate artis logicae." Boehner ed., p. 199 lines 5–6; Spade trans., p. 3 [paragraph (1)].

sixty pages in the critical edition<sup>5</sup> without once giving any hint of that knowledge makes it very unlikely that the purpose of the work was to attack Ockham's views, or that its description of itself as "a treatise on the purity of the art of logic" has anything to do with "purifying" logic of Ockhamist intrusions. The same holds for *The Longer Treatise*. Although it does display a knowledge of and reaction to some of Ockham's views, these are confined to one small part of the treatise as a whole,<sup>6</sup> the rest of which has as little to do with Ockhamist contaminations as does *The Shorter Treatise*.

But if this is so, then just what *does* the odd title mean?

## II. The Solution

At the beginning of the discussion of physics in his *Al-Shifā'*, Avicenna inserts a brief Prologue linking the discussion that follows with the preceding material on logic. Here is how he begins<sup>7</sup>:

وإذ قد فرغنا بتيسيرا لله و عونه مما وجب تقديمه في كتابنا هذا، و هو تعليم  
اللباب من صناعة المنطق

*wa-idh qad faraghnā bi taisīr Allāh wa-'aunihi mimmā wajaba taqdīmuhu fī kitābinā hādhā, wa-huwa ta'līm al-lubāb min šinā'at al-mantiq, ...*

The mediaeval Latin translation of Avicenna renders this as follows<sup>8</sup>:

Postquam expeditivimus nos, auxilio Dei, ab eo quod opus fuit praeponere in hoc nostro libro de doctrina puritatis artis logicae, ...

<sup>5</sup> Boehner ed., pp. 199–260. Compare Spade trans., pp. 3–75.

<sup>6</sup> See n. 3 above.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Sinā, *Al-Shifā'* (*Al-Ṭabī'īyyāt*), vol. 2.1: *Al-Samā' Al-Ṭabī'ī* [= 1-1]. الشفاء: الطبيعيات.

[السمع الطبيعي], Said Zayed, ed., (Cairo, 1983), p. 3 line 4.

<sup>8</sup> Avicenna, *Liber primus naturalium. Tractatus primus de causis et principiis naturalium*, S. van Riet, ed., ("Avicenna Latinus"; Louvain-La neuve and Leiden, 1992), Prologus, lines 1–2 (p. 1).

After sorting out, with God's help, what of the teaching the purity of the art of logic we had to place first in this book of ours ...

Avicenna then goes on to begin discussing physics.

There, standing out prominently, is our phrase, 'the purity of the art of logic' (= *puritatis artis logicae*). 'Purity' (= *puritas, -tis*) here translates the Arabic **لباب** (= *lubāb*), which means the "marrow, pith, core" of a thing. There is nothing then at all mysterious about what Avicenna is saying. He is saying only that now that he has finished going over the "core" of logic, he is ready to go on to physics.

So too then, there seems to be nothing very mysterious after all about the significance of Burley's title; he is just alluding to Avicenna. There is no implication that the purpose of the book is to "purify" logic from foreign contamination, whether coming from Ockham or anyone else.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, if it turns out that there is no real mystery about the meaning of the title, there does remain some mystery about why Burley should have chosen to use it. For *On the Purity of the Art of Logic* does not show any significant influence of Avicenna's views, on logic or otherwise. On the contrary, the main themes of the work, in either version, are characteristic of the peculiarly Latin mediaeval tradition of the *logica modernorum*.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, although Burley did know Avicenna's views, and his *Physics* in particular,<sup>11</sup> he cites Avicenna only twice in *On the Purity of the Art of Logic*, and on both occasions it is Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, not the *Physics* or the *Logic*, that is cited.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to deny that Burley may have written *The Longer Treatise* at least in part to combat Ockham's views; it certainly does that in some places. The point is merely that this fact does not appear to be the basis for the work's title. Rather, the sense of that title can perhaps be whimsically captured by translating it as "The Purée of the Art of the Logic." But, whimsical or not, the *Oxford English Dictionary* does record a similar usage in a letter by Lord Byron: "This stanza contains the purée of the whole philosophy of Epicurus."

<sup>10</sup> See L. M. De Rijk, *Logica Modernorum: A Contribution to the History of Early Terminist Logic*, 2 vols., (Van Gorcum, 1962–67).

<sup>11</sup> See Augustin Uña Juárez, *La filosofía del siglo XIV: Contexto cultural de Walter Burley*, ("Biblioteca 'La ciudad de dios'," no. 1.26; Madrid, 1978), index under 'Avicenna'.

<sup>12</sup> Burley, *On the Purity*, Spade trans., p. 160 [paragraph (330)] and p. 275 [paragraph (973)]. Both references are to Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, v.1 (= *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina*, S. Van Riet, ed., vol. 2, ["Avicenna Latinus"; Louvain-La neuve and Leiden, 1980]), lines 32–57 (pp. 228–30), the famous passage about whether "equinity insofar as equinity" is one or many. Burley cites Avicenna here to support a claim about the proper way to negate "re-

Burley's title therefore does not seem intended to suggest that the parts of Avicenna's *Logic* he may have read are the "core" of the logical art, or that they are in any significant way incorporated into his own work. Rather the title probably indicates only that Burley, like Avicenna in *Al-Shifā'*, is going to give a summary account, what *he* takes to be the "core" of logic, without engaging in textual commentary on Aristotle or anyone else or in wholesale refutation of views he disagrees with. That in any case is what he actually does.

But more needs to be said. Even if Burley did know the *incipit* of Avicenna's *Physics*, and even if he did intend the title of his own work to be an allusion to that *incipit*, there is still the question why he found it appropriate to do so. That is, why did he not find Avicenna's *incipit* just as puzzling as modern scholars have hitherto found Burley's title? After all, as far as we know Burley did not know Arabic, much less the Arabic text of Avicenna's *Physics*, and so would have had no way to know that the '*puritas*' in Avicenna's *incipit* was supposed to be a translation of Arabic *لباب*.

Indeed, '*puritas*' may seem at first like an unlikely translation for this word. But it is worth noting that the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* gives, among the meanings for '*purus*': "free from contaminating ingredients, pure, refined, unadulterated, etc. ... (of grain or fruits freed from their outer coverings)," words that could equally well be used to describe a *لباب*.

Of course, that is the concrete adjective '*purus*', not the abstract noun '*puritas*'. And it is the latter we find in the Latin Avicenna and Burley. Still, the use of the abstract for the concrete is hardly unprecedented — consider the expressions 'your majesty', 'your holiness'. Even without resorting to such expressions of exaltedness, there is precedent for the use of abstract '*puritas*' in particular in a concrete sense very similar to what we find in Burley and the translator's

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duplicative" propositions (propositions with "insofar as" expressions in them). In the context of the first citation (p. 160 [paragraph (330)]), Burley also cites a remark by Averroes that Avicenna "did not make a mistake in logic." (See Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, F. Stuart Crawford, ed., [Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953], III, comm. 30, lines 45–47.)

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Avicenna. Palladius, in his *Opus agriculturae* (= *De re rustica*), while discussing what the Greeks had to say about spicing and caring for wine, has this to say<sup>13</sup>:

item [vinum] faeculentum statim limpidum reddi [adserunt], si septem pini nucleos in unum vini sextarium mittas diuque commoueas et paululum cessare patiaris; mox sumere *puritatem* colarique debere et in usum referri.

Again, [they say] cloudy [wine] will immediately be turned clear if you put seven pinecones in a pint of the wine, stir it together for a while and let it stand a little. Then take the *purity*, strain it and serve.

We are not of course suggesting Palladius had any real influence on Burley's choice of a title. Our point is merely that the use of abstract forms in a concrete sense, and the abstract form '*puritas*' in particular, must have been familiar enough to Avicenna's translator that he found it appropriate to translate the way he did, and likewise familiar enough to Burley that he both understood the sense of Avicenna's *incipit* and expected his readers to understand the sense of his own title. Palladius's text at least shows that this sense would not have been a complete neologism.

### III. Why Was the Solution Not Realized Before?

If the key to Burley's title is as we have suggested, then why did Boehner not realize it but instead go on to speculate about an anti-Ockhamist agenda? The explanation is straightforward. Traditionally, the "standard" edition of the Latin Avicenna used by mediaevalists has been the Venice edition of 1508.<sup>14</sup> In that edition, our passage reads as follows<sup>15</sup>:

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<sup>13</sup> *Opus agriculturae*, 11.14.12, in *Palladi Rutilii Tauri Aemiliani ... Opus agriculturae, De veterinaria medicina, De insitione*, Robert H. Rodgers, ed., (Leipzig: Teubner, 1975), p. 210 lines 1–5. Emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> Avicenna, *Opera*, (Venice, 1508). This edition is of course being superseded by the critical texts in the series *Avicenna Latinus*.

<sup>15</sup> Avicenna, *Opera*, ed. cit., fol. 13<sup>ra</sup>2–8. Emphasis added.

Postquam expeditimus nos auxilio dei ab eo quod opus fuit praepone-  
re huic nostro libro, scilicet, de doctrina *parvitat*is logicae ar-  
tis, ...

Looking past the inconsequential variants, it is clear what has happened here. The crucial word '*puritatis*' has become '*parvitat*is' (= smallness, littleness). Paleographers familiar with scholastic abbreviations from this period will immediately recognize this corruption as perfectly natural, indeed as almost inevitable. As a result, Avicenna's remark about the "core" of the logical art has been turned into a dismissive comment on its alleged pettiness.

The critical edition of this portion of the mediaeval Latin Avicenna was not published until 1992,<sup>16</sup> long after Boehner wrote. On the other hand, the correct *incipit* was known and published by d'Alverny as early as 1952,<sup>17</sup> so that it was available to Boehner if there had been any reason to go look for it. Unfortunately, given the corruption of the *incipit* in the 1508 edition, there was little reason to recognize Burley's title as an allusion to Avicenna in the first place. And, it must be admitted, unless that allusion is recognized, the title remains very obscure indeed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See n. 8 above.

<sup>17</sup> M. T. d'Alverny, "Notes sur les traductions médiévales d'Avicenna," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 27 (1952), pp. 337–58, at p. 351.

<sup>18</sup> A note on the division of labor: Stephen Menn first called Spade's attention to the text of Avicenna discussed here, and to its importance for understanding the significance of the title of Burley's work. Paul Vincent Spade wrote a first draft of this paper. Both authors have collaborated on the final version.