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Aristotle and Averroes: The Influences of Aristotle's Arabic Commentator upon Western European and Arabic Rhetoric

Carol Lea Clark

During the 9th through 12th centuries, Aristotle's works, including the Rhetoric, *were translated and studied in Arabic centers of learning, following the Prophet Mohammad's injunction to "seek knowledge even unto China." Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d. 1198), the most prominent of the scholars who wrote commentaries on Aristotle's works, advocated that pagan Greek philosophical logic and rhetoric complimented, rather than contradicted, Islamic teaching. However, Averroes's strictly rationalist views and appreciation for pagan Greek philosophy clashed with an intensification of Islamic orthodoxy toward the end of the 12th century, and the commentator's reputation declined or disappearerd in Islamic centers of learning. Many of Averroes's works, though, were translated into Latin, Hebrew, and other languages, and his texts were studied along with Aristotle's in medieval Europe. This essay attempts to sbhow that, in a minor way, Averroes's heritage as an Aristotelian commentator continues to be studied and, thus, to influence rhetoric in both Western and Arabic countries. It also demonstrates, however, that these desultory efforts do not take advantage of the potential for insightful scholarship on this subject. In the long history of the dominant intellectual tradition of the Muslim world, Averroes offered for a brief few years the revolutionary perspective that logic, and consequently, rhetoric was independent of ideology or religion. The ramifications of that perspective have yet to be fully explored.*

Keywords: Aristotle; Averroes; Islam; Western Rhetoric; Ibn Rushd

In the ninth century, an international center of learning was established in Baghdad by *Caliph* Harum al-Rashid (d. 809) of the Abbāsid dynasty. Heeding the Prophet

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Mohammad's urge to "seek knowledge even unto China," Muslim scholars studied and translated available texts from other advanced cultures, including those of ancient Greece.

In the *Bayt al-Hikma (*House of Wisdom) and other locations in the widespread translation movement, Greek texts by Aristotle and other authors were translated into Arabic and, by 1050, the entire body of known works by Aristotle had been completed. Indeed, various scholars have suggested that some of Aristotle's texts were saved from oblivion by their translation and close study in Arabic. Commentaries on Aristotle's texts, including the *Rhetoric*, were written by al-Fārbāi, Avicenna, and Averroes, and their commentaries had a lasting influence on rhetorical traditions in the West. This is not to say that Aristotle's ideas were openly and widely accepted. Indeed, the story of Arabic interpretation of Aristotle's works, including the *Rhetoric*, is one of power struggles in which rhetoric about Aristotle's texts, and the texts of his commentators, was used to further particular agendas. According to Oliver Leaman (1988), many of the intellectual elite of the Islamic world at that time "bitterly resented and disparaged" the foreign nature of philosophy and rhetoric (*falsafa*; p. 5). But others, with the active or tacit approval of the ruling elite, attempted to reconcile Aristotle's theories with central tenets of Islam.

For more than twenty-five years, Western scholars of historical rhetoric have been calling for additional attention to be paid to Aristotle's Arabic commentators. In 1975, George Kennedy stressed the need for "an examination of the relationship between the classical tradition and its variants or alternatives within Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or the cultures of Africa or Asia," saying that this was the "the most open frontier" in rhetorical scholarship (p. 282). In 1978, James J. Murphy reminded rhetoricians that "it took the combined weight of Erasmus, Thomas Wilson, Melanchthon, Johann Strum" and others to overcome medieval preconceptions and demand that "language be studied in its totality and all its forms." If the works of Averroes had received continued attention, according to Murphy, "Averroes might have saved the Western world several centuries of linguistic indecision" (p. 356). In 1981, Barbara Johnston Koch reiterated that understanding the Western rhetorical tradition in its entirety will be possible only when we understand "the ways in which classical texts were interpreted by Arab scholars like Averroes, and the political and historical reasons for their interpretations" (p. 103). In 1999, Lahcen E. Ezzaher stressed that because development of rhetoric during the medieval period involved "both sides of the Mediterranean," study of Averroes and his Arabic contemporaries is essential to a full understanding of rhetoric, the discipline that for 2500 years has been the foundation of Western education (p. 45). In 1996, Mark Schaub bemoaned the various surveys and bibliographies of the history of rhetoric which essentially ignore the Arabic contribution, citing as examples the work of Renato Barilli, Walter Fisher, Ruth Morse, Joseph Strayer, and Brian Vickers (pp. 233–234). More recently, *The Rhetoric Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* (2001) by Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg—often used as a primary text in history of rhetoric courses—has expanded the canon of rhetoric to include a number of lesser-known rhetoricians but none of the Arabic commentators.

Schaub (1996) suggests three primary reasons for today's rhetoricians to study the Arabic interpretations of Aristotle's work. First, such study considers whether the Arab commentators saw rhetoric merely as a "set of strategies for transmitting information," or whether they viewed rhetoric as a way to approach "truths about God and God's work in the world" (p. 234). Second, an understanding of the Arab commentators is crucial to comprehend their influence on the way Aristotle's work in general was interpreted by European scholars of the Middle Ages and later. Third, relevant to contrastive rhetoric, such study of how Arabic speakers of Averroes's time organized written texts might inform studies of contemporary Arabic (p. 234). In addition, study of Averroes and the other commentators illustrates how perception of the world through the rhetoric of one culture (Greek) was revisioned by a very different culture (Arabic), and how that second culture made use of or condemned the use of those perceptions. Also, study of the commentators' work might reveal influences from the "discredited" Aristotelian *falsafa* that remain in Arab Islamic rhetoric today.

This essay focuses upon Averroes, also known as Ibn Rushd, the twelfth-century Arabic philosopher (d. 1198) who is generally considered, at least in Western histories of rhetoric, the most prominent of the Arabic commentators on Aristotle's works, as well as the most controversial. Schooled in Greek texts translated into Arabic, Averroes advocated that pagan Greek philosophical logic and rhetoric complemented, rather than contradicted, Islamic teachings. Logic, and, thus, rhetoric, was, for Averroes, independent of ideology or religion—a revolutionary, if not subversive, concept at that time and place. Existing contemporary scholarship contextualizes Averroes's unorthodox scholarship, which was encouraged by Abu Ya'qub Yusuf (d. 1184), *caliph* of the Almohad dynasty in Andalusia (northern Africa and Moorish Spain), as part of an agenda of intellectual and political separation from the Eastern Muslim world. Yusuf, in effect, ruptured the cohesive intellectual traditions of the Muslim world and created, for a few years, an intellectual climate that fostered non-traditional thinking.

This essay explores scholarship discussing the thrust of Averroes's rhetoric, both in his interpretation of Aristotle's works and in his own related but independent philosophical works. By summarizing and analyzing the scholarly conversation about Averroes in modern times, this essay attempts to illuminate the need for further scholarship to reveal the impact of Averroes's Aristotelian commentaries and his revolutionary perspective on logic upon both Western and Arabic rhetoric.

Challenges to Aristotle's Texts in Medieval Arabic Scholarly Circles

According to Daniel Heller-Roazen (2006), the philosophy of the ancient Greeks was, when translated into the Arab context

> called upon to give reasons for itself in the face of the authority of the Qur'an and the teaching of the prophet. To retain itself in translation, the classical discipline

> could not avoid this singular challenge, which at once threatened it with extinction and promised it the possibility of a new life. (p. 412)

Heller-Roazen, in a sense, personifies ancient Greek philosophy as a living corpus that could arouse itself to search within and find arguments to address the Arabic challenge.

The trials faced by the Greek philosophic corpus in Arabic-speaking settings could be compared to those faced by the same texts in Christian Europe in the Middle Ages, "where the classical practice of reasoning was also forced to accommodate itself to the principles of a new religion, as the teachings of the ancients were confronted with the creed elaborated by the fathers of the Church" (Heller-Roazen, 2006, p. 412). Pagan science and religious dogma integrated, with varying success, in the knowledge bases of the Muslim and Christian worlds. One difference was, ironically, that Arabic commentary, translated into Latin, was studied in Europe along with the translated Greek texts, as the philosophers and theologians of Europe struggled with their accommodation of pagan texts into a Christian worldview.

Averroes, like the other commentators, was not simply a philosopher. In addition to his commentaries on Aristotle's works, he wrote treatises on medicine and the law. Basing his understanding upon Arabic translations, he wrote three types of commentary on Aristotle's work: a simplified overview, an intermediate commentary, and an advanced study of Aristotelian thought in a Muslim context. In addition, his original philosophical work, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, defended Aristotle's philosophy against theologian al-Ghazālī's (Algazel, d. 1111) assertions in the earlier *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Al-Ghazālī had focused on refuting the logic of earlier philosophers by demonstrating its contradictions, with the purpose of dismissing any competing strand of thought that was not grounded in religion; Averroes's book refuted al-Ghazālī's text section by section. Arnaldez (2000), in an overview of the life and thoughts of Averroes, makes the case that Averroes's rationality prevented any contradictions between his commentaries on Aristotle and his original works of philosophy, the law, and medicine despite the vast differences in subject matter.

Averroes and other Arabic philosophers of the twelfth century enjoyed a relatively liberal climate of opinion, at least in the court circles of Andalusia, as set by *Caliph* Abu Ya'qub Yusuf. This was a rather dramatic change from the atmosphere of antipathy to *falsafa* traditional in the Muslim world. Alfred F. Ivry (1988) reports what Averroes himself wrote about his meeting with the *caliph*:

> The first thing the Prince of the Believers [Abu Ya'qub Yusuf] said to me ... was "What is their opinion of the heavens?—referring to the philosophers. ... Confusion and fear took hold of me and I began making excuses and denying that I had ever concerned myself with philosophical learning." (quoted in Ivry, 1988, p. 144)

Yusuf, surprisingly, then revealed his own considerable knowledge of the Greek philosophers, and, after further conversation in which Averroes revealed his appreciation of the philosophers, the ruler rewarded him with "a donation in

money, a magnificent robe of honor, and a steed" (quoted in Ivry, 1988, p. 144). Moroccan historian al-Murrakushi records that Averroes was requested in 1184 by Abu Ya'qub Yusuf to analyze Aristotle's translated texts because the Almohad ruler was dissatisfied with the Aristotelian commentaries written in the Eastern part of the Islamic territory. Ezzaher (1999) explains, "Neoplatonic medieval Muslim philosophers . . . such as al-Fārābi and Avicenna, aimed to incorporate Greek philosophical thought in general as a large frame of reference to reconcile philosophy with religion" (p. 34). Abu Ya'qub Yusuf requested Averroes to create an "improved" commentary on Aristotle's opinions, which, rather than reconciling philosophy and religion, would stress their separation, and Averroes did so. Dimitri Gutas (1998) states that Averroes desired a return to a "pristine" understanding of Aristotle, uncluttered by the earlier Arabic philosophers' elaborations and extrapolations (p. 153).

Dominique Urvoy (1991), Ezzaher (1999), and others argue that the work of Averroes should be analyzed in the context of the Andalusian desire to create an identity separate from that of the Eastern part of the Islamic world, and also in the context of a constant perceived threat of a Christian Europe. Ezzaher's analysis attempts to show that Averroes's commentary on Aristotle is "more than a philological enterprise; rather, it is a metatext that articulates a unique rhetorical situation and displays, in addition to ideology, formal textual properties such as audience, domain, tone, voice, and structure" (p. 34). Averroes's work placed Aristotle's philosophy "in a new intellectual context of a multilingual and multicultural medieval society, which experienced in the West as well as in the East a fierce battle between religion and philosophy over state matters" (p. 34). Averroes's commentaries formed part of the academic research sponsored by the Almohads in their effort to promote a social, political, and economic agenda; in the process, their school of philosophy became independent from the one in the eastern Islamic territory (p. 35). Ezzaher (1999) writes:

> The Almohads . . . wanted to establish an independent intellectual tradition in an independent Andalusian state and Averroes was for them instrumental in the shaping of a more liberal educational and intellectual system that encouraged critical thinking in the Western part of the Islamic world, namely Andalusia and Morocco. (p. 34)

Urvoy (1991) suggests Averroes believed that mysticism distorted Avicenna's attempt to reconcile religion and logic. In particular, Avicenna "mixed philosophical analysis with incompatible metaphysical notions" (p. 58). Averroes's position was that knowledge could be reached through speculative science, supported with logic. Averroes envisioned Aristotle's worldview to encompass "not simply what was given in the texts but everything that is coherent with them when they have been correctly interpreted" (p. 57). In his review of Urvoy's book, Philipp W Rosemann (1991) states that Urvoy's "aim is to replace Ibn Rushd [Averroes] firmly in his Andalusian and Almohad context" (262). He explains that Averroes wrote in a time of political reaction against a constant Christian threat which was perceived as undermining the

Islamic culture. Ibn T?mart, the founder of Almohadism, "juxtaposed a rigorously rational theology with strict adherence to the letter of the law, keeping speculative method and positive practice scrupulously apart" (p. 261). Following the precepts of Almohadism, Averroes's effort, in his commentaries, "to restore Aristotelianism to its original purity purged from Neoplatonic accretions must be seen as part of a project to return beyond the syncretism of Islamic *falsafa* to an autonomous philosophy which, however, knows its proper bound" (p. 261).

Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle are so extensive that they include as many as five discussions of the same text. His short commentaries take more liberties in interpretation than the middle commentaries, and focus largely upon the structure of rhetorical argument. The middle commentaries are mainly paraphrases, whereas the long commentaries are literal, line by line, and at times extensive explanations of Aristotle's texts. Study of Averroes's commentaries, however, is complicated because some of the original Arabic versions have been lost, and the texts are only available in Latin or Hebrew translation. The situation becomes even further complicated for an English-speaking scholar because many of Averroes's texts have not been translated into English. For example, only the "Short Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*" (1977) has been translated into English, although Averroes also wrote a middle commentary. However, through articles and books by scholars who are able to read Averroes's texts in other languages, much is known about Averroes's impact both upon his contemporary Islamic setting and, regarding his works in Latin or Hebrew translation, upon Western philosophical and rhetorical study. The English-speaking scholar, though, is at a disadvantage because access to the wording of many of his texts, whether in translation or not, is impossible.

"Short Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*"

In 1977, Charles Butterworth translated and edited the "Short Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*" in *Averroes' Three Short Commentaries on Aristotle's "Topics," "Rhetoric," and "Poetics."* Because no Arabic version of these commentaries was known to exist, Butterworth based his translations on two Judeo-Arabic manuscripts, which means that the manuscripts are written in Arabic, but utilizing Hebrew characters instead of the traditional Arabic characters. One manuscript is labeled as completed in 1356 C.E., and the other has a less reliable date of 1216 C.E. According to Butterworth, a Latin manuscript also exists, but it had been translated from a Hebrew version, so was less authoritative than the Judeo-Arabic manuscripts.

At first glance, Aristotelian scholars might find *Averroes' Three Short Commentaries* an odd combination because the *Topics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics* are not traditionally grouped together, but Butterworth based his collection on Averroes's organization of Aristotle's texts. Averroes included his *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric* and his *Short Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics* with his commentaries on the *Organon*, although the *Organon* typically includes only the *Categories*, *Prior Analytics*, *On Interpretation, Posterior Analytics*, *On Sophistical Refutations*, and *Topics*. Thus, Averroes's commentary on the *Rhetoric* followed the commentary on the *Topics* and

preceded the one on the *Poetics*. Majid Fakhry (2001) suggests that Averroes, in grouping his commentary on rhetoric with the one on poetics, shows the influence of earlier, probably Syric, logicians, not Aristotle; Fakhry argues that Aristotle would have envisioned the activities of a poet as essentially different from a logician, "whose discourse is susceptible of truth and falsity, affirmation and negation," making it a "lower" activity than that of the poet (p. 42). According to Charles E. Butterworth (Averroes, 1977), the restructuring of the *Organon* is crucial to Averroes's understanding of rhetoric, making clear that the commentator viewed demonstrative (topics), sophistic (rhetoric), and dialectic (poetic) arguments as one whole (pp. 19–20). Prior to Butterworth's translation, Western scholars had assumed that the short commentaries were "faithful summaries of Aristotle's thought but Butterworth instead revealed that they were instead an interpretation that, while discussing Aristotelian logic, critiqued the work of Islamic theologians" (p. 100).

Butterworth suggests the three short commentaries he translated are especially important because Averroes, although "especially well informed about the revealed religion which dominated his own community," still found "rare philosophical insight" in the ideas of Aristotle, "a member of a community not affected by revealed religion," and attempted, through his commentaries, to persuade his Muslim colleagues of the merit of Aristotle's ideas (Averroes, 1977, p. 20). Thus, his commentary is an excellent example of the gearing of a text to an audience, and, in this case, an audience not necessarily very familiar with Aristotle's text, although they may have been acquainted with the works of previous Arabic commentators. Averroes begins his commentary with a prayer, "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Help me, God." Then he gives the commentary a title of its own, "A Discourse on Oratorial Statements," endowing the commentary with an identity separate from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Averroes, 1977, p. 63).

However, the commentary is about the effective use of Aristotle's rhetorical tools. Near the beginning of the "Short Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," Averroes divides persuasive elements into two classes, "one of them arguments, and the second external things which are not arguments—like oaths, testimonies" (1977, p. 63). Persuasive arguments are rhetoric, which then fall into two classes: example and the enthymeme. What follows is a fairly technical discussion of enthymemes and syllogisms, and Averroes was careful to distinguish dialectic from rhetoric. Explains Butterworth:

> Even though both arts [dialectic and rhetoric] are used to bring about assent, syllogisms and inductions are used to accomplish this task in dialectic while persuasive things are used in rhetoric—that is, even though enthymemes and examples are used in rhetoric, persuasive devices having nothing to do with syllogistic argument may just as easily be used. (Averroes, 1977, p. 30)

Averroes was arguing that rhetoric, rather than dialectic, was the appropriate art for addressing the public. Like Aristotle, Averroes saw rhetoric's value in practical application; for Averroes, rhetoric is only useful in community, among and between individuals, not for individuals to reach their own conclusions. While elite groups of

theologians and philosophers might gain insight through dialectic and logic, Averroes saw those as not appropriate or useful activities for communication with the masses, while rhetoric was. Deborah L. Black (1990) explains that this conclusion rests on the belief that "ordinary people find the technical distinctions of formal logic tedious and repetitious, and as a result are unable to grasp the full import of the patterns upon which syllogistic conclusiveness is based" (p. 162). Ezzaher views Averroes's position as more pragmatic than elitist, saying that Averroes seems "to appreciate the fact that if logic is lowered from high and rigorous philosophical standards, it is simply meant to adapt in such a way as to meet the needs of public knowledge" (1999, p. 40).

Throughout the "Short Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," Averroes grounds abstract topics by the use of extensive examples which adapt every discussion to the context of Islam. As Leaman (1988) points out, Averroes is critical of those in the Muslim community who do not use rhetoric correctly: "Averroes criticizes sharply the theologians he usually holds up for scorn, Abu Al-Ma'ali and al-Ghazālī, and the philosopher he normally attacks, Galen, for their fallacious attempts at the use of the rhetorical argument, the enthymeme." Leaman summarizes Averroes's logic: "The problem with using inappropriate logical methods of persuasion is that one ends up on different occasions with different conclusions, and this serves to confuse the public and sow doubt in its mind about the validity of religious principles as such" (pp. 137–138). Averroes explains:

> The enthymeme is a syllogism leading to a conclusion which corresponds to unexamined opinion previously existing among all or most people. Unexamined previously existing opinion is opinion which strikes a person as a probably supposition and which he trusts as soon as it occurs to him, even before he has examined it. (1977, pp. 63–64)

Averroes then writes:

> The premises employed in these two arts [dialectic and rhetoric] are not grasped in the mind in the same way as they exist outside the mind. Rather, a predicate is always asserted to apply to a subject because of what is generally accepted, either according to unexamined opinion or according to the truth. (1977, p. 70)

Leaman (1988) describes Averroes as "relishing" Abu al-Ma'ali's "proof" that creation is not possible for the elements, using that as an example of a rhetorical argument which does not hit the truth (p. 139). Averroes quotes Abu al-Ma'ali:

> If a created thing were to have been brought into existence from the four elements, then that could not help but be (a) by means of some bodies intermixing with others until the mass came together in one place or (b) by each one of them independently and separately arising in the composition; and both of these [i.e. alternatives] are absurd. Thus, that there should be one being created from more than one element is absurd. (quoted in Averroes, 1977, p. 66)

Averroes comments that this logic "is an example of that in which all of the opposing considerations are not carefully examined" (p. 66). Similarly, a logical flaw in the use of the example might lead to the conclusion that the heavens are created due to their

similarity to created bodies with respect to extension, alternation, connectedness, and other things (pp. 71–72).

The short commentary on the *Rhetoric*, like those on *Poetics* and the *Topics*, is so technical in its discussion of rhetoric, according to Butterworth, because Averroes intended it to correct misconceptions about the use of rhetoric. Moreover, Averroes was, at the same time, able to stress the importance of rhetoric for "inquiry and instruction," and, thus, contradict the then prevalent tendency to restrict the power of rhetoric to eloquence (p. 21).

Averroes ends the commentary by attempting to explain why Aristotle wrote a book on rhetoric, saying that when Aristotle realized the power of persuasive tools for public discourse, he decided to write down general rules about how persuasive tools could be used. According to Averroes, Aristotle achieved his purpose (1977, pp. 77–78). Butterworth calls this ending of the short commentary "enigmatic" and decided that, not given any evidence to the contrary, Averroes's own reasons for writing the commentary must have been similar to those he attributes to Aristotle, and, thus, had a political motive. Further evidence of this conclusion can be gathered in the political examples, mentioned previously, that Averroes uses to explain the technical aspects of persuasive discourse, particularly what Butterworth calls the "suppositional character of persuasion." According to Butterworth, Averroes "emphasizes that opposition and the possibility of error are always present in persuasive matters" (1984, pp. 130–131).

Craig Smith (1972) claims Averroes believed that persuasion could lead to a kind of certainty: "Averroes's view asserts more than that there are hierarchic levels of audiences and discourse; it asserts, too, that all things *can be* known through demonstration, at least by some higher types of men" (pp. 159–160). Thus, Smith believes Averroes contradicts one of Aristotle's most important ideas—that dialectic and rhetoric, even dealing with crucial questions in society, can give only probable answers. More recently, however, Leaman (1988) suggests that Averroes concedes that complete certainty is not attainable by rhetorical means (p. 139). Black (1990) agrees with Leaman's assessment, saying that the approach of Averroes is that rhetoric gets at what is *presumed* to be true. However, presumption does not necessarily imply falsehood; rather, it refers to the way a proposition gains acceptance, with a "lack of scrutiny and effort that the believer devotes to verifying or falsifying his beliefs (pp. 144–146). Schaub (1996) contributes that Averroes "fully accepted Aristotle's notion that rhetoric, as a practical and highly useful art, could only convince audiences of probable truths" (p. 246). Averroes, for example, disagrees with Abu al-Ma'ali, whom he quotes as saying, "The example proves certainty as a means of guidance, not only as a way toward the syllogism and scrutiny" (quoted in Averroes, 1977, p. 72). Butterworth points out that Averroes appreciated the difficulty of proving through rhetoric the

> key doctrines in Islam, namely the sending of the Prophet and the existence of the creator. Certainty about these doctrines could only be accidental; it would only be possible to attain essential certainty about sense-perceived matters, and essential

> certainty derives only from sensation or from syllogistic reasoning. (Averroes, 1977, p. 102)

Whether Averroes disagreed or supported Aristotle tenets, however, his commentaries clearly are not simply paraphrases or summaries. Rather, as Ezzaher (1999) points out, Averroes's commentaries are a site where "Eastern and Western traditions intersect . . . the commentary participates in the language of the primary text, but at the same time it departs from that language and that culture by creating its own semiotic space" (p. 48). What Averroes is teaching to the twelfth-century intellectual elite of Andalusia who were trained in the minutia of Arabic philosophy is not the same rhetoric Aristotle taught at the Lyceum.

Line between Religion and Philosophy

In *The Incoherence of Incoherence*, Averroes uses an analogy to identify the line between religion and philosophy: If one uses a sharp knife to kill a sacrificial animal, the religion of the knife's owner does not matter. Averroes writes:

> When a valid sacrifice is performed with a certain instrument, no account is taken, in judging the validity of the sacrifice, of whether the instrument belongs to one who shares our religion or to one who does not, so long as it fulfills the conditions for validity. (quoted in Ezzaher, 1999, p. 36)

So, utility is the measure of a tool, not its source. Averroes describes "a code of ethics in reading classic texts," urging Muslim scholars to allow what part of ancient Greek texts "accords with the truth" and cautioning against use of what does not, while excusing the Greeks from fault because they were from a different culture (Ezzaher, p. 36). In effect, logic is independent of ideology, so the ideology of a text's author doesn't matter, if it offers useful knowledge. Averroes writes in *On the Connection between Religion and Philosophy*:

> If someone other than ourselves has already examined that subject, it is clear that we ought to seek help toward our goal from what has been said by such a predecessor on the subject, regardless of whether this other one shares our religion or not. (quoted in Ezzaher, p. 36)

Consistent with the Prophet's endorsement of learning, Averroes suggests that whoever forbids the examination of Greek texts by anyone who has the knowledge to study them is "blocking people from the door by which the Law summons them to knowledge of God, the door of theoretical study which leads to the truest knowledge of Him" (quoted in Ezzaher, 1999, p. 36).

However, Heller-Roazen (2006), in his analysis of Averroes's *Decisive Treatise*, reminds us that Averroes, himself a jurist and a judge, was appointed principle magistrate first of Seville, then later of Cordoba. Indeed, Ibn al-'Abbār, one of Averroes's first biographers, identifies Averroes primarily as a jurist (p. 414). The *Decisive Treatise*, which takes the format of the *fatwā*, a legal explanation, according to Heller-Roazen, is unique in the Arabic tradition "in its project to define, 'from the perspective of the Law,' the nature of the connection between wisdom [philosophical

logic] and the Law" (p. 419). In the treatise, Averroes attempts to prove that philosophy and logic fall within the purview of Islamic jurisprudence. Heller-Roazen summarizes Averroes's argument as a three-part syllogism:

> Philosophy is nothing other than the contemplation of beings insofar as they indicate their maker, namely, God; the Law enjoins humankind to reflect upon the universe and, in this way, to apprehend God; philosophy, therefore, cannot but be commended (ma' am-ūr) by the Law, either as "recommended" (mandūb) or as "obligatory" (wajib). (p. 420)

Averroes cites five passages from the Qur'an as being among "innumerable verses" that support the Prophet's command to "reflect on the universe," thus supporting his inference that philosophy falls within Islamic law and should be recommended or obligatory. For example, he quotes the question, "Have they not reflected upon the kingdoms of the heaven and the earth and what things God has created?" (in Heller-Roazen, 2006, p. 421). Averroes's reasoning leads quickly to a vindication of ancient Greek syllogistic reasoning. If the Law requires full reflection, then it necessitates the study of logic, which was invented by the Greeks in the study of philosophy. In further support of his reasoning, Averroes invokes the status of the syllogism used in Islamic jurisprudence (*al-quiyās aš-šarīī*), which any jurist must learn in order to follow the Prophet's dictate to reflect upon God's creations (p. 422). He goes so far in support of Greek logic as to say, "It has become evident that reflection upon the books of the ancients is obligatory according to the Law, for their aim and intention in their books is the very intention to which the Law urges us" (quoted in Heller-Roazen, 2006, p. 423).

Fakhry (2001) stresses that in the *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes declared the parity of philosophical truth and religious truth; although philosophical truth is "higher" than religious truth, it is not "really incompatible with it, or even different from it" (p. 162). The apparent difference is due to the audience, with philosophy being addressed to a higher audience in terms of education and awareness. According to Ivry (1988), Averroes had a tolerant attitude toward the "attainment of others," because he accepted the idea, common to Greek and his contemporary Arabic philosophers, that "the pursuit of truth requires a collective effort" and that "one should acknowledge the contributions to knowledge made by those of other faiths, and particularly those of the pagan Greeks" (p. 147).

Averroes Falls from Grace, Yet Influences European Philosophy

Averroes's strictly rationalist views and appreciation for pagan Greek philosophy clashed with an intensification of Islamic orthodoxy toward the end of the twelfth century, and he was banished, to be rehabilitated only at the end of his life. Ibrahim Y. Najjar (1996) compared Averroes's fall from grace to that of Socrates in 399 B.C.E, saying:

> [Averroes] was even less fortunate than Socrates. For while . . . [Socrates] was at least invited to defend himself against the charges that were leveled against him, the

> Arab philosopher was never summoned to court, nor was he ever presented with properly articulated charges. (p. 191)

The *fuqaha* or council interpreted his works "in the worst possible way" and issued a verdict that "Ibn Rushd was a *mariq*, a semi-unbeliever, who was to be cursed" (p. 191). One of Averroes's disciples, Ibn Sab'īn (d. 1270), dismissed him as an imitator of Aristotle, and Ibn Taymayah (d. 1328) vehemently disputed the validity of Averroes's Aristotle-derived logical proofs (Fakhry, 2001, p. 167).

However, Averroes had a lasting impact upon philosophy and rhetoric in the thirteenth century and beyond in Europe. According to James J. Murphy (1974), it was the Arabic commentators (al-Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes, and others) who "reintroduced the work [Aristotle's *Rhetoric*] into Western life" (p. 91–92). Schaub (1996), focusing upon Averroes's contribution, called his work a "kind of filter through which Aristotelian discussions of logic, theology, and also rhetoric reached the West" (p. 236). Indeed, Fakhry (1997) credits Averroes with even more influence, saying that acquaintance with the works of Averroes in translation brought about a "genuine intellectual revolution" in scholarly circles (p. 3). Fakhry also suggests, "The most important part of the Arab-Islamic philosophical legacy to find its way into Western Europe and to exert a lasting influence upon Western-European thought, during the 13th century and beyond, was Averroes's corpus of Aristotelian commentaries" (2001, p. 131).

The first to translate Averroes's works in the thirteenth century were Jewish philosophers, and Latin translation began soon after. Thomas Aquinas and other philosophers within the Christian scholastic tradition studied the works of Averroes along with those of Aristotle, calling Averroes "The Commentator" and Aristotle "The Philosopher." Thomas Aquinas, who disagreed with Averroes over a number of religious issues, was, nevertheless, heavily influenced, quoting Averroes 503 times; some Latin scholars actually considered Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle to be wholly Aristotle's thoughts, even though Averroes included his own opinions (Fakhry, 1997, p. 5; Urvoy, 1991, p. 127). Etienne Gilson proposes that Averroes's legacy was a "purely rational philosophy" that altered "the evolution of Christian philosophy" (quoted in Fakhry, 1997, p. 6).

The reception of Averroes's work was not universally reverent, however. A circle of philosophers in Paris and Padua, later known as the Latin Averroists, developed such influence that they aroused the disapproval of the Catholic Church, resulting in proclamations in 1270 and 1277 by Bishop Etienne Tempier condemning their beliefs as "double truth," meaning that they supposedly believed in one truth for religion and one for philosophy—something Averroes himself did not advocate. Ivry, however, makes the argument that not all of the works of Averroes had been translated into Latin by that time, and, if they had been, Averroes's works and Aristotelianism would not have been viewed by the Catholic Church as a "foe of organized religion" (1988, p. 143.)

Despite religious controversy, however, Averroes continued to be studied in Italy from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, where he was known as the consummate

interpreter of Aristotle, with John of Jandun (d. 1343) and Pietro Pompanazzi (d. 1525) among his prominent advocates (Fakhry, 2001, p. 136–138). At least six editions of Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle were printed in Venice between 1525 and 1575, which were used in the universities as an aid to teaching Aristotle into the late seventeenth century, and inspired several scholarly works on Aristotelian logic. Harold Stone (1996) makes the case that Europeans stopped reading Averroes after the publication of Peter Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, first printed in 1697 and reprinted in multiple editions into the nineteenth century. The dictionary developed good reputation but, unfortunately for Averroes, Bayle could not read Arabic, and he apparently did not read Averroes's Latin editions either. Bayle's entry on Averroes, although respectful, essentially dismisses the commentator as a disciple of Aristotle and, thus, not worthy of separate attention. Even worse, Bayle adopted the understanding of those who stereotyped Averroes as a "scoffer" at religion, and records a story, though untrue, that Averroes had been a Christian who converted first to Judaism then Islam, and finally became an atheist. Stone explains:

> The pious reader would see no reason to read yet one more opponent of religion, and the eighteenth-century rationalist was given little motive to study a commentator on Aristotle. And no one presented Averroes as a writer who continued the mysterious truths of Oriental wisdom. (p. 87)

Thus, Averroes was an unwitting victim of Bayle's literary effort. However, Leaman (1996) disagrees with this timeline, writing that Averroes was rediscovered in the 1850s by Salomon Munk and Ernest Renan. Munk credited Averroes with being part of the foundation of Jewish and Christian philosophy, and Renan praised Averroes for defending reason against faith (p. 54) and for being the "creator of the form of Grand Commentary" (quoted in Fakhry, 1997, p. 5).

The Fate of Averroes's Work in Arabic-Speaking Countries

Although Averroes influenced centuries of European thought before disappearing into obscurity, his work was alienated from Islamic culture until the late nineteenth century. Several scholars, including Schaub (1996) and Urvoy (1991), have explained the disappearance of Averroes's influence as a result of a movement known as a *kalam*, a point of contention or fault line in Islam that was a struggle between philosophy and theology, resulting in the argument among theologians that there was no place for philosophy or rhetoric within the Islamic religious community. In short, although Averroes and his followers enjoyed an openness of philosophical and rhetorical logic for a few decades, that openness retained permanence in only one discourse community in Islam—the law (Schaub, p. 238; Urvoy, pp. 106–109). Islamic experts on jurisprudence continued to employ rhetoric to create a binding consensus of learned jurists (*ijma'*) on legal matters by discussing relevant references in the Quran and the *Hadith*, a non-scriptural text (Schaub, p. 240). This practice sounds reminiscent of what Iysa A. Bello (1989) described as Averroes's understanding that there were two types of *ijma'* or consensus depending upon whether the

issue involved the essentials of Islamic religion or not; Bello's analysis of Averroes's argument, however, is that Averroes was attempting to undermine *ijma'*, and he, thus, agrees that Averroes was a "disbeliever" (p. 142).

Philip Halldén (2005) offers a different perspective on Averroes's lack of prominence in Arabic culture. In modern-day Arabic, the word *rhetoric* translates into two different words: *al-balāgha* and *al-khatāba*. The first term, *'ilm al-balāgha*, the science of eloquence, involves the study of tropes and figures, and is generally associated with historical Arab Islamic rhetoric. The second term, *fann al-khatāba*, or art of rhetoric, is used to refer to *falsafa*, the foreign tradition of philosophy imported from the ancient Greeks, particularly Aristotle. Halldén explains:

> The distinction between *'ilm al-balāgha* and *fann al-khatāba* thus seems to be based on the assumption that while the former constitutes an integral part of the Islamic theological sciences proper (*'ulūm aldīn*), the latter belongs to the tradition of philosophy (*falsafa*) and therefore is not really representative of Islam. (p. 20)

Averroes is associated with *fann al-khatāba* or *falsafa*, the foreign—and, therefore, suspect—tradition.

Halldén suggests that another prominent reason why Averroes's ideas (or those of *falsafa* in general) are not considered influential in modern Arabic rhetoric involves changes in the definition of rhetoric in Western culture from 1500 forward, which involved reducing the traditional canons of rhetoric (*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *actio*, *and memoria*) to a preoccupation with literary tropes and figures which fall within the scope of *'ilm al-balāgha*. Thus, when nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western scholars searched for an equivalent of current Western rhetoric, they focused on *'ilm al-balāgha*, rather than *fann al-khatāba*. Furthermore, according to Halldén, both *'ilm al-balāgha* and *fann al-khatāba* were influenced by ancient Greek rhetoricians, and *fann al-khatāba* exists even today in the form of the tradition of Islamic preaching and homilies, which have been little studied by Western scholars because they have not been considered rhetoric (pp. 26, 33–34).

In 1885–86, two works by Averroes were published in print for the first time in an Arabic country, and by 1988 some 100 editions of various works had been released, as well as numerous articles, monographs, and essays. Fueled by the availability of these texts, Averroes became a rallying figure for Arabic intellectuals and scholars who bemoaned the decline of the medieval Arabic culture that once rivaled or surpassed the learning of European culture in science and philosophy. As Anke von Kügelgen (1996) explains:

> For some, this decline and technological backwardness must be traced to the failure of Ibn Rush's [Averroes's] rationalist thinking, i.e., the triumph of orthodoxy and mysticism ... adherents of the West are identified with Ibn Rushd, and those of the mystical way of life with fatalism and irrationalism. (p. 97)

Members of this movement took as a model Averroes's rationalist ability to integrate a foreign tradition and his own culture without losing the identity of either.

Von Kügelgen (1996) points out, however, that the very nature of science and philosophy has changed over the years since Averroes developed his system, and

questions whether it is possible to develop a modern understanding of these subjects with "ideas rooted in natural determinism, theocentrism and teleology; with a logic that is linear, categorical, and deductive; and with a science that deems thing and word to be identical" (p. 97). In 1992 Farah Antūn (d. 1922) advocated that the "ills" of the East could be remedied by freedom of expression marked by separation of religion and politics, linking his ideas to Averroist rationalism. Antūn's ideas immediately sparked controversy. The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Muhammad 'Abduh, in response, argued for the superiority of Islam over other religions which separate the spiritual and the temporal (Fakhry, 2001, p. 168–169). Antūn and other authors who resuscitate Averroes, "albeit in a somewhat mutilated manner," says Von Kügelgen, want to show that Islamic culture is equal to that of the West, not by showing "the dissimilarity of Islamic culture and the West, but by using Averroes's 'model' to show a partial or essential similarity between the two" (1966, p. 117–118). In 1976, on the occasion of the 850th anniversary of Averroes's birth, R. Arnaldez issued a similar caution, pointing to the "dangers of seeking questions in Ibn Rushd's writings which the author could never have asked" (Urvoy, 1991, p. 1).

Leaman (1996) says Averroes in the twentieth century has been a "symbol of the possibility of reconciling modernity with Islam" and has been admired as "an intellectual who was prepared to present his views in unreasonable circumstances" (p. 53). However, a researcher must be careful, Urvoy suggests, to avoid the tendency to see Averroes "as a free thinker along nineteenth-century lines or to regard him as a forerunner of the 'subjective immortality' of Auguste Comte via his theory on the unity of the Agent Intellect" (1991, p. 1). Likewise, cautions Urvoy, contemporary tensions in the Muslim community may encourage certain Muslims to look to a simple "resurrection" of *falsafa* in the name of Averroes. However, by failing to place Averroes's work in its historical context, they lose its essence and reduce it to a "collection of slogans which at their most extreme are quite as obscurantist as those of their fundamentalist opponents" (pp. 1–2).

Westerners may be equally guilty of attempting to resurrect Averroes. Paul Kurtz, speaking on the occasion of the First Special International Conference on Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and the Enlightenment, held in Cairo in 1994, said that the lack of any impact of Averroes's work upon Muslim scholarship was "one of the great intellectual tragedies of philosophy" (p. 31). Perhaps ignoring the context of Averroes's work, Kurtz fantasized that Averroes's influence "might have led to a new Muslim Renaissance and Enlightenment and perhaps an outburst of scientific discovery similar to that experienced by Western Europe and America" (1996, p. 31).

S.M.A. Shahrestani (1996), however, speaking at the same conference, contradicted Kurtz's position, stating, "Naturally Islamic scholars have had far more of his [Averroes's] works at their disposal" and that Averroes has influenced Islamic culture more than Western scholars realize (p. 212). For example, Shahrestani quotes Averroes's division of Muslims into three categories: "There are people who concede to rational reasoning; those who concede to dialectical arguments, as if

they are logical ones; and those who concede to speech as if they are logical proof" (quoted in Shahrestani, 1996, p. 213). Shahrestani goes on to discuss Averroes's three groups. The first group are those who "understand the importance of using reason and rationality . . . thus, they are . . . adherents of the Enlightenment School of Thought" (p. 213). The second group prefers to use intuition to reason when making decisions, often intuition "as perfected through deep contemplation and periods of retreat" (p. 214). Shahrestani disagrees with Averroes's assertion that the second group chooses this path because of a "lack of capacity to reason." Rather, according to Shahrestani, those with high intellect such as al-Grazali may choose to learn from contact with the divine rather than from reason. The third group are Muslims who have "gone astray and who have mislead others" by relying upon their emotions rather than wisdom (p. 214). These are the Muslims who oppose enlightenment (p. 215). "I wonder how much the scholars of the Enlightenment really know about Muslim scholars?" asks Shahrestani. "Islam . . . calls for the use of reason in order to distinguish between right and wrong, although the use of reason stops on matters of worship" (p. 217). Shahrestani goes on to describe several contemporary Muslim scholars who, in the spirit of enlightenment, have called for political reform which allows citizens to "call their rulers to account" (p. 215).

Arnaldez (2000), makes the case that Averroes is a "role model for rationalism" in Islam, praising the philosopher for "openness of mind" and "rigorous method," although he does concede that Averroes was not a "martyr for freedom of thought" (pp. 120, 15). Mohammed Arkoun's scholarly essay, "Rethinking Islam Today" (2003), demonstrates one way in which Averroes is still being referenced, although not in literal recitation, in efforts to liberate Islam from stereotypes; in this case, Islam is "imagined as inferior (to Jewish and Christian traditions), unchanging, and militant by the West; and superior, dynamic, and peace loving by Muslims" (p. 18). Arkoun calls for an epistemological approach to examine the "implicit postulates" in Islamic thought. He explains:

> It is not possible . . . to use in Arabic the expression "problem of God" associating Allah and *muskhil* (problem); Allah cannot be considered as problematic . . . this means that . . . all the cultures and systems of thought related to pagan . . . or modern secularized societies are maintained in the domain of the *unthinkable*, and, consequently, remain *unthought* in the domain of "orthodox" Islamic thought. (p. 20)

Arkoun advocates an approach in which some of the *unthinkable* becomes *thinkable*. He gives as a model of an interesting way to think about Islam in historical context the interchange between al-Ghazālī and Averroes, previously mentioned, in which Averroes responded to al-Ghazālī's attack on philosophy (p. 26). Al-Ghazālī had claimed that the philosophers were infidels who were attempting to transfer matters dependent upon belief to demonstrable knowledge. Averroes, in return, used an argument based upon judicial conventions to refute

al-Ghazālī's assertions. Arkoun does not advocate adopting any specific doctrine from Averroes or other Arabic philosophers but rather their willingness to discuss critically matters that, he says, have generally been closed to discussion since the Middle Ages. Arkoun apparently would have some questions about Shahrestani's assertion that "reason stops on matters of worship" (p. 217) and might argue that some matters of worship should be open to critical discussion. And so the discussion continues about what the impacts of Averroes's ideas were, are, and should be.

Conclusion

Najjar (1996) asserts that in the history of Eastern and Western scholarship, Averroes has inspired "many extreme interpretations, as if it were this philosopher's fate to be used repeatedly by thinkers who insist on seeing him as he was not" (p. 2). While this may be an extremist statement, it is clear that the Aristotelian commentator created his life's work in a relatively brief cultural moment of Muslim tolerance of Greek philosophy. Although his writings fell into disfavor in Arabic culture, Averroes's works were translated into Hebrew and Latin, resulting in a continued influence on the development of Western European rhetoric, before falling into obscurity after the sixteenth century, only to be resurrected in a minor way in the twentieth century. The story was not over for Averroes in Arabic-speaking countries either, however, because his works were revived through Arabic publication beginning in the nineteenth century, and his spirit of rationalism has been invoked in a variety of ways both scholarly and political.

However, much remains to be studied by Western scholars to understand fully the influence of Averroes upon Arabic and Western rhetoric, historical and present. Averroes's middle commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* has yet to be translated into English, which would enhance the ability of English-speaking scholars to evaluate Averroes's notion of rhetoric. English-speaking scholars must continue to rely on the brief "Short Commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," analysis of his other translated texts, or articles by Arabic-speaking scholars to further their awareness of Averroes's understanding of Aristotelian rhetoric and its influence upon Arabic culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as well as in more recent times. With general interest in all things Arabic increasing in the last few years due to world events, perhaps it is time for the call for more study of Averroes and the other Arabic commentators, first made more than twenty-five years ago, to be answered by the addition of their works to the canon of rhetorical works generally studied in Western universities along with other long-neglected texts. Perhaps Koch's words about studying Averroes are even more relevant today than when she wrote them in 1981: "It is becoming increasingly imperative that we study the rhetorical traditions of the Middle East in their own right, as a vital clue to understanding how Arabs talk, and how to talk with them" (p. 103).

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