Title - Differentiating Averroes’ Accounts of the Metaphysics of Human Epistemology in his Middle and Long Commentaries on Aristotle’s De Anima

Program of Study – B.A. in Philosophy

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Abstract: Averroes (sometimes called Ibn Rushd) was a prominent Islamic, Andalusian philosopher and jurist in the 12th century. His commentaries on Aristotle shaped the course of western philosophical thought, exercising a significant influence on St. Thomas Aquinas, among others. Several of his works, most prominently his three commentaries on Aristotle’s De Anima, discuss the metaphysics of human epistemology in an attempt to explain how finite, particular minds interact with universal, eternal intelligibles. Current scholarship focuses on the two longer commentaries, the Middle Commentary and the Long Commentary, but there is no consensus regarding which of these presents Averroes’ final articulation of the metaphysics of human epistemology. Those who maintain that Averroes wrote the Middle Commentary last tend to minimize the differences between the two accounts, claiming that they are superficial and the result of socio-political pressure rather than intellectual development.

This paper does not take a position on the chronology of Averroes’ works. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate that, even if Averroes wrote the Middle Commentary last, it is evident that the accounts of the metaphysics of human epistemology in the Middle and Long commentaries differ substantively. In this effort, the Middle and Long commentaries will be surveyed separately and
then compared and contrasted. Once the differences have been identified, they will be examined in light of Averroes socio-political environment and evaluated in light of his dialectic with the religiously conservative thinker al-Ghazali. The conclusion of this analysis is that Averroes’ socio-political environment serves to highlight, rather than explain away, the differences between his accounts in the *Middle* and *Long* commentaries.