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## **Averroes' Middle Commentaries on Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione (review)**

Paul Vincent Spade

Journal of the History of Philosophy, Volume 24, Number 1, January 1986, pp. 117-118 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press  
DOI: *10.1353/hph.1986.0004*



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Charles E. Butterworth, translator. *Averroes' Middle Commentaries on Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. Pp. xx + 193. \$22.50.

The volume is the first in a projected series of translations from the Arabic of Averroes's so-called "middle commentaries" on Aristotle's logical works, and on the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. Averroes (1126–1198) wrote three different kinds of commentaries on Aristotle: short "epitomes," exhaustive "long" commentaries, and—as here—intermediate or "middle" commentaries. The purpose of these last appears to have been to explain the text of Aristotle clearly and concisely, with a minimum of digression. (Nevertheless, as Butterworth points out, the *Middle Commentary on the De Interpretatione* strays rather far from Aristotle's own work.) These new translations of the middle commentaries are based on the most recent critical editions now being published by the American Research Center in Cairo.

The *Middle Commentary on the De Interpretatione* has never before been translated into any language except Latin and Hebrew. But a previous English translation of the *Middle Commentary on the Categories* appeared as recently as 1969.<sup>1</sup> In his *Preface*, Butterworth explains why a new translation is appropriate. The previous translation was based on the Bouyges edition of the Arabic text, published in 1932. Since that time, several other manuscripts of the Arabic text have been located. Moreover, the Leiden manuscript on which Bouyges mainly based his edition appears to reflect an earlier and less polished redaction of the text. The Florence manuscript on which the most recent critical edition (and Butterworth's translation) is based seems to present Averroes's own revised and improved version of the text, done some six months after the version that stands behind the Leiden manuscript.

Butterworth's *Preface* also briefly retells the still fascinating story of the preservation and transmission of Aristotle's works, of how they were translated first into Syriac, then from Syriac into Arabic, and finally from Arabic into Hebrew and Latin. But it would be a mistake to think (and here Butterworth's remarks might leave the reader with the wrong impression) that the Latin West obtained the texts of Aristotle only or even primarily via this circuitous route through the Arabic. On the contrary, as B. G. Dod observes, "There is a tenacious legend that the West learnt its Aristotle via translations from the Arabic, but the fact is that the West turned to Arabic-Latin translations only in default of the more intelligible Greek-Latin ones. The only translations from the Arabic to achieve wide circulation were the *De caelo*, *Meteorologica* I–III, *De animalibus* and *Metaphysics*, and all of these except the *De animalibus* were quickly displaced by William of Moerbeke's versions."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Herbert A. Davidson, translator, *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge, Translated from the Hebrew and Latin Versions, and on Aristotle's Categoriae, Translated from the Original Arabic and Latin Versions*, "Corpus Commentariorum Averrois in Aristotelem," vol. I, a, 1–2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> Bernard G. Dod, "Aristoteles latinus," in Norman Kretzmann, et al., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Ch. 2, 45–79, at 52. Moerbeke's translations were directly from Greek.

To possess and read the texts of Aristotle, however, is not automatically to understand them. Here Latin translations of the Arabic commentators, and particularly of Averroes, were of decisive importance. So true is this that, just as the Latin West called Aristotle "the Philosopher," so too Averroes was called simply "the Commentator"; everyone knew who was meant. Nevertheless, in the case of the *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, Averroes's importance in this regard was minimal. For not only had the Latins possessed these Aristotelian works ever since Boethius's translations in the sixth century. They also had Boethius's own commentaries on them, commentaries far more elaborate and detailed than Averroes's concise presentations in his *Middle Commentaries*.

In addition to the *Preface*, the present volume contains a separate *Introduction* to each of the two works translated here, separate outlines or tables of contents for each of the translations, the translations themselves, and an index. Bekker numbers in the margins coordinate the sections of Averroes's commentaries with the corresponding passages in Aristotle. Notes are confined mainly to giving cross references and to explaining certain terms in the translation. I do not read Arabic, and so am in no position to judge the accuracy of the translations, but they read smoothly enough in English. (This is not to say of course that the doctrine is always easy going.)

Wherever possible, Butterworth has adhered to the terminology of Ackrill's translations of the *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*. In the *Middle Commentary on the De Interpretatione*, however, Butterworth renders the notion of logical subcontraries as "subordinate contraries." The term "subcontraries" is a standard and familiar term in logical vocabulary, and as far as I can tell, there is no reason to think Averroes meant anything else here.

The volume is well produced, and the printing remarkably accurate. I found only one small misprint: on p. 137 in n. 2, the transliteration of Aristotle's Greek should read *pathemata*, not *pathesmata*.

PAUL VINCENT SPADE

*Indiana University*

Myles Burnyeat, editor. *The Skeptical Tradition*. Major Thinkers Series, vol. 3, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983. Pp. 450. Cloth, \$38.50. Paper, \$10.95.

During the quarter-century which has passed since the first edition of Richard Popkin's *The History of Scepticism* was published, skepticism has attracted much attention, principally in two ways: first, as a field of research into the history of ancient, renaissance, and modern philosophy; and second, as a problem in its own right in connection with contemporary discussions about epistemology and the history and philosophy of science. This book is an outstanding example of the first-mentioned class of research and to a lesser extent an instance of such attempts to relate the two approaches as the recent works of Naess and Rescher.

The originality of this book lies in that, for the first time, it gives us a quite satisfactory view of the history of skepticism as a tradition stretching from the fourth