ON THE NATURE AND FATE OF CHAPTER V OF IBN RUSHD’S EPITOME OF ARISTOTLE’S METAPHYSICS*

Rüdiger Arnzen

One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings (…) inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings.

Flann O’Brien, *At Swim-Two-Birds*

In 554/1159 Ibn Rushd completed his compendium of the Aristotelian natural sciences (other than psychology and biology), which consisted of epitomes of four works, *Physica, De caelo, De generatione et corruptione*, and *Meteorologica*. Presumably not much later, he decided to append to this compendium a fifth epitome, the *Jawāmi‘ Kitāb mā ba’d al-tabī‘a (Epitome of the Metaphysics)*, henceforth *EM*. The text is preserved in 17 Arabic manuscripts dating from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries. During the first half of the thirteenth century it was translated into Hebrew twice: the translation prepared by Mosheh ben Shemuel ibn Tibbon is preserved in at least 14 manuscripts, while another, anonymous, translation is quoted nearly in its entirety in books IX and X of Shem Tov ibn Falaquera’s *De’ot ha-Philosophim*, of which we have two manuscripts. The Hebrew version of Ibn Tibbon, in turn, was translated into Latin in 1523 by Iacob Mantinus.

In all these versions the text is divided into four chapters (*maqālāt*, in the Arabic tradition). However, Ibn Rushd declares shortly after the beginning of the text that he had divided his work into five chapters, and this declaration is likewise unanimously transmitted in all versions. This raises the question whether *EM*, as we know it today from the manuscript tradition and the editions based thereon, contains the

---

* It is a great pleasure and honour to dedicate this article to Prof. Hans Daiber who has constantly followed, encouraged and supported my work for many years. My gratitude goes to Prof. Dimitri Gutas, Prof. Ámos Bertolacci and Prof. Hinrich Biesterleidt for their corrections and erudite comments on a first draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Prof. Mauro Zonta who kindly shared his knowledge of the Hebrew tradition of Ibn Rushd’s works.
final version intended by Ibn Rushd for circulation—i.e., whether the absence of Chapter V is due to the fact that Ibn Rushd changed his mind about it (he either never composed it or did so, but decided later to withhold it from publication), or to an omission in the manuscript tradition. In either case, the question of what this fifth chapter was about (or was supposed to be about) deserves study, either in order to gain a complete picture of Ibn Rushd’s basic division of metaphysics or to learn what part of the Metaphysics it is that he changed his mind about and possibly discarded, either because of its minor importance or for other reasons.1

Having explained that the contents of the Aristotelian Metaphysics basically fall into three sections, Ibn Rushd provides some introductory notes on the topics of the first two sections, and then proceeds to the third section, as follows:2

1 The scholarly literature on EM provides no detailed investigation into this question, but only three conflicting statements: I. Husik (‘Averroes on the Metaphysics of Aristotle,’ The Philosophical Review 18 [1909], pp. 416–28; repr. in F. Scagin in collabor. with M. Amawi, C. Ehrig-Eggert, E. Neubauer [eds.], Abu l-Walīd Muhammad Ibn Rushd: Texts and Studies, vi: Ibn Rushd and his Commentaries on Plato and Aristotle [Frankfurt, 1999], pp. 136–48) maintains that Chapter V was about ‘the subjects of the special sciences’ (p. 422/142) and that Ibn Rushd’s reference to former thinkers and their errors on this topic is related to ‘the philosophical and theological sects of his days’ (ibid.). S. van den Bergh (Die Epitome der Metaphysis des Averroes, trans. S. van den Bergh [Leiden, 1924], p. II), on the other hand, holds that Chapter V dealt with the axioms treated in Metaph. IV (Γ) and Aristotle’s polemic against his predecessors, while J. Puig Montada remarks that book IV (Γ) was not taken into consideration in EM and believes that Chapter V provided a correction of the principles of the particular sciences or the foundation of physics and mathematics through metaphysics (cf. Ibn Rushd, Compendio de Metafísica, ed. and trans. C. Quiros Rodriguez, introd. J. Puig Montada [Madrid, 1919; repr. Seville, 1998], pp. xvii–xviii).