Butterworth examines how three of treatises of Averroes wrote provide “ways of imitating or abridging correct reasoning to influence other human beings in any number of situations” (19), and why Averroes might have addressed such a topic in his work. According to Butterworth “rhetoric is the proper art for instructing the general public or addressing it about any matter,” therefore it is the art of public speaking. Butterworth argues that the whole treatise is organized to show why rhetoric is more suited for public discourse than dialectic, and that Averroes is against dialectic. However, it is not the use of dialectic that spurs Averroes on. Rather, it is the matter of who uses it, and for what purpose. Averroes urges that theologians that use dialectic be questioned. Dialectic, in his view, does not support the type of “complicated theological disputes,”(27) and if it does not support a full and thorough investigation it should not be used.

However, based on Butterworth’s analysis, it isn’t clear that Averroes favors rhetoric. While Averroes may define it as the “art of public speaking” that does not mean it could be easily trusted. In fact Butterworth points out that rhetoric enables the speaker to “pass over difficult matters and “be deceptive” (29).

At a surface level dialectic and rhetoric are similar, but when examined more closely

it is dialectic that leans on the use of syllogisms and inductions where as rhetoric uses methods of persuasion. This is done in criticism of the theologians of his time, and their use of dialectic. This is important because Averroes, in his work, looks at the relationship between religion, philosophy and politics. He felt that the religious belief “shaped and molded” the arts. Therefore, what was necessary to investigate are the beliefs that influence and political life was then influenced by these beliefs.

1. Is Averroes view of rhetoric similar/different than Aristotle’s?
2. Does Butterworth present Averroes as having a negative or positive view of rhetoric?