



## AFTER APPROPRIATION: EXPLORATIONS IN INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

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# ibn Rushd or Averroës? of Double Names and Double Truths: A Different Approach to Islamic Philosophy

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Unlike other non-Western traditions explored in contemporary comparative philosophy, Islamic thought stands out as a “hybrid” with both an “Eastern” and a “Western” face. It is partly a continuation of Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, partly an intellectual tradition defined by its own very distinct questions and concerns, whether they are of a religious, legalistic, cosmological, epistemological, or ethical nature. This unique property is not always rightly appreciated by Western scholars, in particular specialists of the Middle Ages, who may focus excessively on the “reflection” of the Western face in medieval sources. As a result, the medievalist’s approach often fails to recognize questions, intentions, and methodologies specifically developed in and for a Muslim context. In particular, it does not see that the so-called Western face is “Easternized.”

To be sure, some Muslim philosophers may have more Greek traits than others. However, as with the Hellenistic Buddha-figures, the blend is harmonious – there is but one face.

To enhance the appreciation of “nativeness” of philosophy in Islam, the present paper will regularly point out features that are characteristic of Muslim forms of inquiry, or, sometimes, merely to Arabic Islamic culture such as the actual significance of the personal name, which helps with the assessment of Muslim authors in their own historic context. More importantly, attention will be given to titles of works carefully crafted to guide the interpretive efforts of the reader, elements of debate typical of the *Kalām* tradition (dialectical theology) that – although originally developed for oral exchange – are reflected in writing as well, and, finally, the import of jurisprudential terminology and the use of reasoning techniques developed by Islamic Schools of Law that are in no way derived from Greek sources.

Basically, the purpose is to help readers interested in the field to understand that just in the same way as Muslim philosophers did not wear cloaks or togas but robes, their ideas too are “clothed” in a different fashion. The fact that their ideas bear cultural, or even ethnic, features does not make these ideas less relevant to other philosophical traditions. There is no need of a new tailoring for a more “Western” look. Quite to the contrary, these features wrap ideas and concepts in ways that can, if appreciated, enrich the dialogue between the traditions.

It is with this possibility in mind that the following examines a text generally referred to as *The Decisive Treatise* (*Faṣl al-Maqāl*), written by the Andalusian Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd (520–595 A.H./AD 1126–1198), the famed Averroës of the Latin tradition. This text, the legalistic reflections of which clearly marked it as a work written for an Islamic audience, was deemed of no consequence to a Christian philosophical and theological world view. As a result – and unlike Ibn Rushd’s commentaries on Aristotelian works – it was never translated into Latin during the Middle Ages. In Europe, the history of the reception of this text begins with the printing of the original Arabic text in 1859 (a revised version came out in 1942). A German translation appeared in 1875, a French one in 1905, and a Spanish one in 1947. The first English version was published by Muhammad al-Jamil al-Rahman in 1921. The two currently most widely used English translations are by George F. Hourani and Charles E. Butterworth. The first appeared in 1961; the latter in 2001.

To help discover the “native” design of this text, this paper will explore four questions:

1. what’s in a name?
2. what’s in a title?
3. what’s in a question?  
and
4. what’s in an answer?

As the following will show, major lessons may be drawn from addressing precisely these questions, no matter how unrelated they may at first appear to a Western sense of philosophical relevance. Indeed, all four questions will contribute to the uncovering of the strong influence of Islamic jurisprudential tradition, language, and methodology on Ibn Rushd’s thought. The last two, will, furthermore, open up an interpretive path entirely defined by legal directives.

## WHAT’S IN A NAME?

From a Western perspective, Ibn Rushd’s life-long career as a magistrate, crowned with a position as Chief Justice in his native Andalusia, is usually considered to be unconnected with his philosophical and scientific research. Quite in contrast to assessments made in Muslim biographical sources, the underlying assumption is that what is essential about Ibn Rushd’s work are his additions to and further elaborations on Greek-based sciences and thought. Accordingly, most medievalists discuss him to this day under his latinized name “Averroës,” strengthening thereby his status as the extraordinary philosopher who contributed to the advancement of Christian-European culture. What is missing in their otherwise highly appreciative profile is Ibn Rushd the theologian and expert of Islamic Law (*shari’a*), and, more generally, Ibn Rushd the philosopher-scientist whose primary intention it was to contribute to his own culture. Little did Ibn Rushd know that his latinized name would eventually be both glorified and vilified in the Christian West. Unfortunately, the same fate – albeit for different reasons – was to befall his name in the Islamic world as well.

But what was his *full* name? In his own world the Andalusian philosopher was known as Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Rushd. This is, for instance, how he signed his manuscripts. How to explain this name, or rather this sequence of names? In Arabian culture individuals are perceived as links between past and future generations. Their very names identify them as links in family chains. The first part of a name thus signals whether an individual has fathered or mothered offspring, i.e., whether he or she is already acting as a link between the generations. This part of the name is called the “*kunya*.” Ibn Rushd’s *kunya* informs us that his oldest son was al-Walīd (*abū* = father of), while his own *ism*, i.e., first name, was Muḥammad. We are further given the first names of his father and grandfather, Aḥmad and Muḥammad, respectively (*ibn* = son of). This part of an individual’s name is the “*nasab*” (lit. “lineage”). ‘Ibn Rushd,’ the name by which our Andalusian philosopher is mostly referred to in Islamic sources, is actually the name of his family clan, i.e., the Banū Rushd. This part of the name is called the “*nisba*.” The fact that Ibn Rushd was referred to by his *nisba*, is no minor piece of information. It helps us understand that in his own culture Ibn Rushd’s fame (or “infamy” depending on who judged him) did not belong to him alone but to all of the Banū Rushd, a family mostly remembered for having produced a great number of prominent lawyers. There is no indication that *our* Ibn Rushd ever had the intention to break with that family tradition and stand out as the radical and lonely rationalist often portrayed in Western scholarship. In the same way as his ancestors, in particular his father and grandfather, had traced his life path by preceding him as Andalusian magistrates, he himself placed the burden of an intellectual life dedicated to the well-being of the city on the shoulders of his own sons who continued being judges – and physicians. And yet, there was room for “individuality” of a Western type in that many Arabs also enjoy a nickname, called “*laqab*.” Ibn Rushd’s *laqab* was al-Ḥafīd, i.e., the grandson, to distinguish him from his grandfather who had also been a Chief Justice. Clearly, the nickname he was given identifies him as the heir of a jurisprudential family tradition.

Considering the ethnic and cultural connotations present in Ibn Rushd’s name, it should be clear by now that the only acceptable reference to our Andalusian philosopher is by the name that correctly renders his *nisba*. This is not just a matter of proper scholarly transliteration,

or, more generally, of linguistic “correctness.” It entails an entire change of perspective, since it signals to Western readers that, despite all common traits (such as Aristotelian rationalism) and sources (mainly from the ancient Greek and Hellenistic period), the philosopher they are about to be informed about emerged from a culture that is not only religiously but also intellectually distinct from their own. Does this mean that the name “Averroës” is to join the debris of a discontinued (or, more likely, never truly engaged) dialogue between Muslim and Christian philosophers? No, there does remain a legitimate space for the use of ‘Averroës,’ provided that one is aware that this name bears the marks of a specific historic context, i.e., Western medieval culture, in which, to put it mildly, some intellectual positions of Ibn Rushd have been interpreted in most peculiar ways. Positively connoted, ‘Averroës’ refers to “*the* commentator” (of Aristotle). This is the language one encounters, for instance, in the works of Thomas Aquinas, the champion of Christian philosophy and theology. Unfortunately, in the same works one also finds a negatively coloured use of Ibn Rushd’s latinized name. It then connects to a long controversy known as the “Averroistic heresy,” which played a critical role in challenging both ecclesiastical and political authorities in medieval (and Renaissance) Europe and, as a result, was dealt with most harshly by those same authorities. However, as will be pointed out towards the end of this paper, Averroistic theses are of Western origin and sprung mostly from a misreading of Ibn Rushd’s philosophy, which in turn was due to medieval Christians’ being entirely unaware of there being a theological basis for many of Ibn Rushd’s ideas – albeit an Islamic theological basis.

## WHAT’S IN A TITLE?

What better way then to acquaint oneself with Ibn Rushd the Arab, the Muslim, and the Chief Justice than to explore the work commonly known as *The Decisive Treatise*, a text in which the Andalusian philosopher focuses on the relation between Philosophy and Law, not the Greek *nomos* (which he, of course, knew from both Plato’s and Aristotle’s works) but *shari’a*, Islamic sacred law? This relation could never have been a central issue to a Christian philosopher-theologian in the Middle Ages. The big controversy in that culture and period was whether reason and faith clashed – not philosophy and law. The founder of Christianity left no instructions

as to what Christian Law might be. Besides, as Christian religion moved away from its Jewish roots and spread within the Roman Empire, it found a highly sophisticated legal system in place that it ultimately incorporated. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that the work called *The Decisive Treatise* found no audience in Christian medieval Europe.

But what exactly is the wording in the original title? The full Arabic title says *Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl wa taqrīr mā bayn al-sharī'a wa al-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl*. George F. Hourani renders the title as *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, while Charles E. Butterworth remains *prima facie* more faithful to the original by calling it *The Book of the Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection between the Law and Wisdom*. In fairness, one must add that Hourani does offer a correct and complete rendering in the introduction to his translation where he calls Ibn Rushd's work: "The book of *the decision (or distinction) of the discourse*, and a determination of *what there is* of connection between religion and philosophy." The passage clarifies three important points:

1. The original title does not presume to give the ultimate answer in respect to the subjects to be explored. It is not a "decisive treatise" but a book dealing with "the *decision (or distinction) of the discourse*";
2. The work in question is not a treatise but a *discourse (maqāl)* indicating that it is designed as a piece of *Kalām*; and
3. Ibn Rushd was not investigating *whether* there is a connection between "religion" and "philosophy" but rather *what the nature* of the connection is.

Butterworth's translation, however, is not without merit. Its appeal lies in that it names with greater precision the subjects the relation of which is to be investigated in the text: Law and Wisdom. By comparison, while Hourani's 'religion' covers Islamic law and 'philosophy' and is a valid equivalent for the original *ḥikma*, the English title gives no indication of there being a jurisprudential context. The term '*ḥikma*' also signals that Ibn Rushd has given precedence to the native Arabic term for wisdom. It is as if Ibn Rushd had wanted to remind his fellow Andalusians that

the pursuit of wisdom is not solely the domain of the ancient Greeks. Isn't one of Allah's names *al-Ḥakīm* (= 'The Wise')? The term '*ḥikma*' has, in addition, the advantage of being etymologically related to a number of words that belong semantically to the legal field such as *aḥkām* (= legal categories of human acts; plural of *ḥukm*), which will be discussed in the following section, *ḥakam* (= judge), and, of course, *ḥukm* (= judgment). One may now realize how ingenious it was of Ibn Rushd to opt for *ḥikma* over *falsafa*, the Arabized word for 'philosophy:' The notion of *ḥikma* carries through its root '*ḥ-k-m*' an unmistakable legal connotation. Its very semantic texture suggests its vicinity to Law, which is precisely what Ibn Rushd wished to further demonstrate in his discourse. A careful discussion of the discourse's title suggests that for Ibn Rushd Philosophy and Law are united in a common pursuit. Not surprisingly, he ends up calling them "milk-sisters" for having drunk from the same source of knowledge and "companions by nature and lovers by essence and instinct" (p. 70).

It is to be hoped that the analysis of the exact wording of the title was no futile exercise in the reader's mind. As the contemporary Tunisian scholar El Ghannouchi comments, referring to Ibn Rushd's *Faṣl al-Maqāl* as *The Decisive Treatise* makes the Andalusian philosopher appear to be "pedantic and pretentious," as if he had wanted to present "in a peremptory fashion the definitive and decisive solution to the secular question of the accord between religion and philosophy" (my translation). What is one to do after over a century in which this erroneous title has been circulating? Rather than trying to impose a new standardized title, it seems best to use the Arabic original: *Faṣl al-Maqāl*.

## WHAT'S IN A QUESTION?

According to most historians *Faṣl al-Maqāl* was composed around 575 A.H./1179 CE, i.e., some seventeen years before Ibn Rushd and his younger son 'Abdallah were denied access to the great mosque of Cordova, Ibn Rushd's works burned and he himself eventually sent into exile. And yet, *Faṣl al-Maqāl* already shows the marks of a text written by an author under siege.

*Faṣl al-Maqāl* begins by addressing the subject under investigation: "The purpose of this treatise [*sic*] is to examine, from the standpoint of the study of the law, whether the study of philosophy and logic is [1] allowed

by the Law, or [2] prohibited, or [3] commanded – either by the way of recommendation or as obligatory” (p. 44). In other words, the question is whether it can be made legally binding to allow, study, or reject (Greek derived) philosophy and logic. In order to fully appreciate the strategy at work in the question Ibn Rushd designed, one needs to know the *aḥkām* mentioned previously, i.e., human acts as defined by Islamic jurisprudence.

There are five *aḥkām*, traditionally discussed in the following order: 1) obligatory (*farḍ*); 2) not obligatory but recommended (*mustaḥabb* or *mandūb*); 3) neutral or permitted (*mubāḥ*); 4) not forbidden but discouraged (*makrūh*); and 5) forbidden (*ḥarām*). By comparison, in his listing of the legal options open to investigation Ibn Rushd begins with the middle – neutral – category that he also calls “*mubāḥ*.” After, he moves on to the last two categories that he addresses together as “*maḥẓūr*.” Finally, he also conflates the first two categories as commanded (*ma’mūr*). This new category he then divides into “*mandūb*” and “*wājib*.” One wonders about the reasoning behind the reshuffling of the *aḥkām*. The juxtaposition of the two lists is revealing:

	<b>Categories of human acts (by divine decree)</b>	<b>Ibn Rushd’s categories (by legal decree)</b>
1	obligatory ( <i>farḍ</i> )	obligatory ( <i>wājib</i> )
2	not obligatory but recommended ( <i>mustaḥabb</i> or <i>mandūb</i> )	commanded ( <i>ma’mūr</i> )
3	neutral or permitted ( <i>mubāḥ</i> )	recommended ( <i>mandūb</i> )
4	not forbidden but discouraged ( <i>makrūh</i> )	allowed ( <i>mubāḥ</i> )
5	forbidden ( <i>ḥarām</i> )	prohibited ( <i>maḥẓūr</i> )

It becomes clear now that the language of the strong categories “obligatory” (*farḍ*) and “forbidden” (*ḥarām*) has been softened. No matter how high the status of a magistrate, he does not have the authority to declare an act either obligatory or forbidden in the scriptural sense. The legal obligation the jurisconsult extrapolates is mandatory but to a lesser degree than the divinely decreed obligation. It can never be *farḍ*, only *wājib*. In

other words, if it turns out that the study of philosophy is to be declared mandatory, the obligation may never become comparable to the necessity of fulfilling one's ritual prayers, incumbent upon all believers regardless of their predisposition and intellectual abilities. However, if the finding is negative and the study of philosophy is doomed, it shall not end up becoming forbidden in the way adultery or the consumption of pork is (these are unnegotiable prohibitions), but will instead be "*maḥẓūr*," which, according to Ibn Rushd's own legal manual, corresponds to the fourth *ḥukm*: "*makrūh*," meaning "not forbidden but discouraged."

The precise phrasing of the opening question in *Faṣl al-Maqāl* unravels the investigative strategy pursued by Ibn Rushd, which is aiming at preventing the full loss of philosophy. The Andalusian is, in fact, telling his opponents that, while every jurisconsult has, of course, the power to issue a *fatwā* (a legal ruling) forbidding "the reflection on beings," as Ibn Rushd defines philosophy (see following section), there is no scriptural basis to do so, which is the only means by which philosophy could be definitively banned from Muslim lands. Ibn Rushd's own ruling is that the available legal basis could only lead to preventing some groups of fellow Muslims from "reflecting on beings." Thus individuals lacking appropriate intellectual disposition and/or preparation are not to take upon themselves the burden of true *ḥikma*, since the level of reasoning required for this task may put their faith at risk (cf. p. 61).

## WHAT'S IN AN ANSWER?

Ibn Rushd's answer closely follows the discourse's introductory question. To the reader somewhat familiar with Islamic theological training, the answer is ingeniously clear and simple: "We say: if the activity of philosophy is nothing more than study of existing beings and *reflection* on them as indications of the Artisan ... and if the Law has recommended and urged *reflection* on beings, then it is clear that what this name signifies is either obligatory or recommended by the Law" (ibid., my emphasis).

The middle term of what appears to be a syllogism is *reflection*. *Prima facie*, this is the structure that presents itself:

Philosophy is *reflection* on existing beings, and  
The Law recommends and urges *reflection* on beings (= God's  
creatures),  
Therefore, philosophy is either obligatory or recommended.

This first glance reading led some commentators to think of this being a case of flawed reasoning. Butterworth, for instance, notes “the first premise is not evident; and the second stretches the Qur’ānic verses cited as evidence.” I beg to differ: *First*, the initial premise as it emerges in Ibn Rushd’s answer is carefully preceded by an ‘if.’ The Andalusian philosopher was obviously aware of many more ways to define philosophy. The ‘if’ is an invitation to accept a somewhat narrow notion of philosophy, narrow enough to be compatible with scriptural injunctions, which, as a note in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* suggests, may actually reflect Ibn Rushd’s genuine understanding of philosophy. *Second*, as for the “stretching” of the Qur’ānic verses, Ibn Rushd is following a tradition that began in Andalusia with the philosopher-mystic Ibn Masarra (d. 310 A.H./AD 931) and can actually be found throughout Islamic philosophy. In his *Treatise on Inference (Risāla al-ʿItibār)*, the older Andalusian philosopher invokes dozens of verses enjoining the rational and scientific investigation of the universe. We are dealing here with a matter of the “inner-cultural evidence” of a statement. Passages such as “*Have they not studied the kingdom of heavens and the earth, and whatever things God has created?*” (VII, 185) – coincidentally quoted both in *Faṣl al-Maqāl* (p. 45) and in Ibn Masarra’s *Treatise on Inference* (p. 6) – have been taken by the earliest Muslim commentators to mean that the Qur’ān urges believers to make sense of God’s creation by rational means. By invoking the verse, Ibn Rushd is simply reminding his conservative opponents that Islamic theology has long accommodated the need for rationality and sciences. *Third*, and more importantly, Ibn Rushd has a different conclusion from the one read by Butterworth. Here is the content of the actual conclusive statement in context:

If philosophy is *reflection* on existing beings, and  
If the Law recommends and urges *reflection*,  
Then *what this name signifies* is either obligatory or recommended by the Law (my emphasis).

Drawing conclusions by focusing on the meaning of a central term is a characteristic trait of Ibn Rushd's Mālikī training (Malikites belong to one of four Sunni Schools of Law). To give a practical example: in his courtroom Ibn Rushd once used this procedure to determine that a student who had done great damage to the reputation of a teacher in Cordova by insinuating that the teacher was infatuated with one of his pupils was to be punished in the same way as the slanderer who accuses a woman of adultery. Qur'anic Law provides flogging as the appropriate punishment for the unjustified attack brought against a woman's honour (*qadhf*). Ibn Rushd decided that the student who had defamed the teacher in question should be subjected to the same corporeal punishment. There was no formal syllogism involved in Ibn Rushd's ruling. All he did is reason by using a procedure his school of jurisprudence called "*qiyās al-mā'nā*," analogy by meaning. This is not a case of flawed reasoning, it is just a different type of reasoning. It may not be Aristotelian, but it is all the same logical, according to the criteria afforded by Mālikī methodology.

This type of "semantic reasoning," as I call it, is also at work in Ibn Rushd's philosophical work. For instance, in *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, Ibn Rushd refers briefly to how he countered al-Ghazālī's attack on the Aristotelian theory of the eternity of the world in his *Incoherence of the Incoherence*:

Concerning the question whether the world is pre-eternal [*qadīm*] or came into existence [*muḥdath*], the disagreement between the Ash'arite dialectical theologians [such as al-Ghazālī] and the ancient philosophers is in my view almost resolvable into a *disagreement about naming*... For they agree that there are three classes of beings: two extremes and one intermediary between the extremes. *They agree also about naming the extremes, but they disagree about the intermediate class.* (p. 55)

The first class refers to "originated" beings, the opposite of which are "pre-eternal" beings. Applied to the world, the world, inasmuch as it comes into existence, i.e., has a beginning in time, is an originated being. Translated into theological terms, the world was created by God (who is, of course, the only pre-eternal Being). Ibn Rushd resolves the contradiction between Aristotle and Islamic scripture (and generally biblical tradition) by claiming that the notion (but not necessarily the term) "pre-eternal" may be

safely applied to God's creation, provided one takes the term in its intermediary meaning. It then signifies "the world as a whole" (*al-ālim bī asrihi*), neither fully eternal (since it has needs of an agent cause) nor perishable the way the single beings in it are. Leaning on Plato and his school, Ibn Rushd ends up calling the world "originated *ab aeterno*" (*muḥdath azalī*; my translation).

What is most striking about this finding is that Ibn Rushd reveals himself to be much more a Muslim lawyer than the strict Aristotelian logician that Western scholars like to project situated in a context dealing precisely with a Greek-derived problem. This does not mean that Ibn Rushd abandoned his beloved master Aristotle altogether, only that he felt at liberty to choose when to apply what form of reasoning. As it turned out, "semantic reasoning" was the better strategy to pursue both, in harmonizing Aristotle's theory of the eternity of the world with scripture and declaring reflection on beings a legal obligation.

Aristotle's logic remains, however, integrated in the remaining obligations Ibn Rushd extrapolates in his discourse. Thus, another obligation says "The Law, then, has urged us to have demonstrative knowledge of God" (p. 45). And to clarify that by "demonstration" he, indeed, means Aristotelian demonstration. Ibn Rushd asserts in the preparation to a further conclusion that "it is difficult or impossible for one man to find out by himself and from the beginning all that he needs" (p. 46). Therefore, there is a legal obligation to follow a more knowledgeable authority "regardless of whether this other one shares our religion or not" (p. 46ff.). The Andalusian philosopher then specifies: "By 'those who do not share our religion' I refer to those ancients who studied these matters before Islam" (p. 47). Without any question, the non-Islamic authority on demonstration to include in one's endeavour to reflect upon beings is Aristotle.

Among the possible objections Ibn Rushd addresses in *Faṣl al-Maqāl* is one of particular interest. It will allow us to close the circle that began by distancing ourselves from the Averroës of the Latin medieval tradition. To the opponent who may resentfully declare that not everyone can follow the intricacies of intellectual reasoning and that, therefore, demonstration cannot be made incumbent upon all believers, Ibn Rushd gladly concedes:

The natures of men are on different levels with [their paths]  
to assent [*taṣḍīq*; my addition]. One of them comes to assent

through *demonstration*; another comes through *dialectical arguments* just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstration, since his nature does not contain any greater capacity; while another comes through *rhetorical arguments*. (p. 49)

This is precisely the kind of assertion that gave rise in medieval Europe to the “theory of double truth.” While Averroism propagated this theory to maintain that one and the same position could contain different truth values, i.e., one for philosophy and another for theology, Ibn Rushd himself never did propose two (or, as the quotation above would rather suggest, three) “Truths.” Quite to the contrary, he actually emphasized that “truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it” (p. 50). To understand his position, one need take into account the theological frame within which he developed his ideas. Thus when Ibn Rushd affirmed that one and the same truth may be expressed in multiple ways, he was concerned with how that truth could be accessible to members of a religious community who are naturally different from each other in terms of their reasoning abilities. In this, the Andalusian philosopher thought as a Muslim theologian and applied an important requirement of Islamic faith that ensures that both prospective believers and adherents already in the faith be able to give their consent (*taṣḍīq*) to their religion on the basis of personal persuasion. The reasoning is as follows: since certainty in one’s religious beliefs is an essential tenet of Islam, it would be unfair to expect an intellectually diverse pool of believers to agree with doctrinal issues in uniform terms. As a result, Ibn Rushd envisaged society divided into what one might call “epistemic classes.” Like many of his Muslim predecessors who were inspired by Plato’s tripartition in *The Republic*, Ibn Rushd ended up defining three classes: the masses who reason through the use of images (*rhetorical arguments*), the rational theologians who elaborate on their religious knowledge within a pre-defined frame (*dialectical arguments*), and the philosophers who expand on religious knowledge (*demonstrative arguments*). Thus, while all groups have access to the same scriptural truth, they differ in the means that permits them to make sense of scripture. The assignment of different types of arguments to different epistemic classes is to be read as an entitlement given to each of these classes. The masses, for example, are like the theologians and philosophers under the obligation

to reason, except that Ibn Rushd the magistrate grants them the privilege of reasoning according to their very capabilities.

How ironic it was to call Ibn Rushd's theologically motivated epistemic tripartition a heresy becomes particularly evident when one realizes that the entire Christian tradition of biblical exegesis rests on the same understanding of scripture holding different levels of meaning. St. Augustine's distinction between "historical, etiological, analogical, and allegorical" has thus been discussed and refined for more than a millennium of Christian theology. And Thomas Aquinas (whom the Middle Ages credited for having crushed "Averroistic heresies") seems to be echoing precisely Ibn Rushd when he writes in his *Summa Theologica*: "It is ... befitting Holy Scripture ... that spiritual truths be expounded by means of figures taken from corporeal things, in order that thereby even the simple who are unable by themselves to grasp intellectual things may be able to understand it" (Part One, q. I, art. 9)! Thomas Aquinas never suspected that, rather than being an offender, Ibn Rushd was actually an ally in promoting as he did the belief in the existence of one Truth.

In conclusion, there has never been a Rushdian theory of multiple truths. All there was was an understanding that individuals with different intellectual capabilities should be permitted to reason according to the means naturally available to them. And there never has been a "decisive treatise," rather a "discourse" in the best tradition of *Kalām* examining the intrinsic relation between Wisdom (*ḥikma*) and Law (*shari'a*). More importantly, wisdom and law were understood to be rational disciplines dealing both with beings, which to the strongly Almohad-influenced Ibn Rushd meant that they had to be compatible. That wisdom and law were "milk-sisters" was his genuine conviction. In his mind, wisdom guided law and law protected wisdom. It would, therefore, be a gross error to assume that Ibn Rushd had advanced this view only to give Greek-derived philosophical pursuit (*falsafa*) a simile of legitimacy in an Islamic context. He did not mean to safeguard the place of *falsafa* in Islamic culture but *ḥikma*, a pursuit more broadly defined to accommodate Muslim intellectual needs that may or may not include Greek expertise and methodologies. No matter how great Ibn Rushd's admiration for Aristotle was, ultimately the object of his intellectual pursuit was wisdom itself. Depending on circumstances and the nature of a problem to be solved, reasoning techniques and/or concepts could be borrowed from the Greeks or from an Islamic

school of thought. While demonstration was understood to be a classical Greek tool, reasoning itself was not perceived as the monopoly of ancient Greece.

Without any question, the historic Ibn Rushd was a radically different thinker from the Averroës created by the medievals and perpetuated by the later Western tradition. Before the West knew of Ibn Rushd the “Commentator,” there existed in Islamic Andalusia Ibn Rushd the “Magistrate,” which is how the Islamic world remembers him to this day. While one should like to tell contemporary Muslim theologians that Ibn Rushd the *qāḍī* should not be separated from the disciple of *Aristū* (Aristotle), the West ought to realize that it is the Commentator who must not be separated from the Magistrate.

## APPENDIX

Visually speaking, my move away from the Western medieval setting can be conveyed by contrasting Filippino Lippi’s “The Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas over the Heretics” (1488–92) with Raphael’s “School of Athens” (1510/11). Lippi’s “The Triumph” is located at the Carafa Chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome. It is one of many works commissioned by the Dominican order to celebrate Thomas Aquinas’s victory over Averroës and other heretics. Not only does it feature a crushed Averroës at the feet of the Christian philosopher-theologian but also it shows him holding a Latin inscription saying “*sapientia vincit malitiam*” (“wisdom defeats malice”). Considering what a lover of wisdom – or *ḥikma* – the Andalusian philosopher himself was, the inscription is rather ironic, not to say malicious.

By comparison, one can tell that Raphael had no intention to perpetuate the image of an Averroës solely to be remembered for his commentaries on Aristotelian works and the controversy these sparked in the West. If that had been the intention, surely the Andalusian would have been placed in the vicinity of Aristotle. Instead, one finds him lovingly depicted as the Muslim he was, clothed with a turban and a green kaftan, leaning over the shoulders of the writing Archimedes (3rd century B.C.), in a posture expressing deep humility, but not humiliation, before a respected and admired predecessor. To fully appreciate the inclusion of Ibn Rushd in

“The School of Athens,” one need realize that he is the only non-ancient author in this august assembly of Greek, Roman (and Persian) philosopher-scientists. No one else from a later period was considered worthy enough to be included in Raphael’s “School of Athens.” Ibn Rushd with his great love for the Greeks would not have minded being associated with them. Nevertheless, to use an Aristotelian term, it is doubtful that he would have thought of the “School of Athens” as his *natural place*. In his mind, he most certainly would have felt that – notwithstanding the many differences in opinion – he belonged to the philosopher-scientist-theologians of the Islamic tradition of thought such as al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), and al-Ghazālī.

## Notes

- 1 For the history of this text, manuscripts, editions, and translations see ‘Abdurrahmān Badawī, *Histoire de la philosophie en Islam* (Paris: Vrin, 1972), I:751–52.
- 2 *The Philosophy and Theology of Averroës*, trans. Muhammad al-Jamil al-Rahman (Baroda: A. G. Widgery, 1921); George F. Hourani, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac & Co., 1961); Averroës, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. with introduction and notes by Charles E. Butterworth (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001).
- 3 Among the exceptions one should list R. Brunschvig’s “Averroës juriste,” in *Études d’orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi-Provençal* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1962), I:35–68, an essay that focuses on Ibn Rushd’s manual of jurisprudence *Bidāyat al-Mujtabid wa Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid*; and Dominique Urvoy’s “Ibn Rushd,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 330–45, in which the impact of Ibn Tumart’s “doctrine of thought” on Ibn Rushd’s both philosophical and legal positions is repeatedly discussed. One should also commend Roger Arnaldez for dedicating an entire chapter to Ibn Rushd the jurist in his *Averroës: A Rationalist in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).
- 4 Islamic biographic sources mention that several of his sons had served as judges. No precise information is

- available for al-Walid, his eldest son. It is recorded, however, that among his other sons Abū al-Qāsim Aḥmad was a *qāḍī* (= judge), while Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallah had become physician to Muḥammad al-Nāṣir, the son of the Almohad caliph whom Ibn Rushd had served. See Charles Burnett, “The ‘Sons of Averroës with the Emperor Frederick’ and the transmission of the philosophical works by Ibn Rushd,” in *Averroës and the Aristotelian Tradition*, ed. Gerhard Endress and Jan A. Aertsen (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 263.
- 5 This is very much in contrast to the Jewish scholarly community that – like Islam – was and continues to be marked by an equally legalistic religious tradition. For a reference to a Hebrew translation, see Badawi, *Histoire de la philosophie en Islam*, 751.
- 6 George F. Hourani, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, 1 (emphasis added). A. El Ghannouchi who is right to criticize the many erroneous titles given to *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, in particular those influenced by Léon Gauthier’s French translation beginning with *Le Traité décisif...* (1905), does not appear to be aware of Hourani’s note (“Distinction et relation des discours philosophique et religieux chez Ibn Rushd: *Faṣl al-maqāl* ou la double vérité,” *Averroës (1126–1198) oder der Triumph des Rationalismus* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2002), 39–147.
- 7 This explains Ibn Rushd’s reference to it in his *Kitāb al-Kashf* as a “speech” (*qawl*). For a different view, see Averroës, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, xix.
- 8 For the many terms used in Islamic tradition to cover the kind of thought and intellectual pursuit that is called philosophy in a Western context, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The meaning and concept of philosophy in Islam,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 21–26.
- 9 Butterworth points out some more legal terms in the title of Ibn Rushd’s *Faṣl al-Maqāl*: “The term *faṣl* literally means ‘separating’ but also has a legal significance and can thus suggest something like ‘decisive [rendering of] judgment.’ *Taqrīr* is also a legal term, one denoting a decision set down by a judge, or an assignment or stipulation” (Averroës, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, xix).
- 10 Unless indicated otherwise, English quotations are from Hourani’s translation, while the original Arabic terms are gleaned from Butterworth’s bilingual edition.
- 11 A. El Ghannouchi, “Distinction et relation des discours philosophique et religieux chez Ibn Rushd: *Faṣl al-maqāl* ou la double vérité,” 139.
- 12 Ibn Rushd, *The Distinguished Jurist’s Primer – Bidāyat al-Mujtabid wa Nibāyat al-Muqtaṣid*, trans. by Imran Ahsan Khan Nyazee (Reading, UK: Garner Publishing, 1994), xlvi.
- 13 Averroës, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, xxiii.
- 14 “... the *law* that is particular to philosophers is that of examining closely the totality of beings, because there is no nobler way to worship the Creator than by knowing His works”; quoted after Roger Arnaldez, *Averroës: A*

*Rationalist in Islam*, trans. David Streight (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 5.

- 15 Joseph Kenny, O.P., "Ibn Masarra: His *Risāla al-i'tibār, Orita*." *Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 34, nos. 1&2 (2002): 1–26.
- 16 This is essentially no different from the ancient Greek cultural (and probably also religiously motivated) assumption that the beauty of the cosmos can be explained rationally and that what makes it rational are the mathematical structures and proportions underlying it. While the supposed "mathematicity" of being became, indeed, the driving force of Western sciences and thus proved to be "correct," many accompanying assumptions such as the perfect luminosity and sphericity of heavenly bodies and circularity of orbits turned out to be flawed. A Qur'anic statement may be read as the same incentive for
- 17 rational investigations without itself necessarily complying in all respects with scientific findings.
- 17 Arnaldez, *Averroës: A Rationalist in Islam*, 17.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 19 Butterworth translates "everlastingly generated" (Averroës, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, p. 15), while Hourani says "originated and coeval with time" (174).
- 20 *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by Anton C. Pegis (London: Random House, 1945).
- 21 For the impact of Ibn Tūmart's "doctrine of thought" (which is at the basis of Almohad-supported theology) on Ibn Rushd's both philosophical and legal positions, see Dominique Urvoý, "Ibn Rushd," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 330–45.