

## **IBN RUSHD: THE PHILOSOPHER OF CORDOBA**

### **AIM OF LECTURE:**

- Present a brief overview of the place of philosophy in the Arab-Islamic world
- Introduce Ibn Rushd and the general aims and concerns of his works and writings in philosophy and Islamic jurisprudence
- Highlight some of the most central ideas and arguments presented by Ibn Rushd in defense of the place of philosophy and its role within a monotheistic-Islamic context

### **I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE ARAB-ISLAMIC WORLD:**

- a. Entry of philosophy into Baghdad – 9<sup>th</sup> C AD
- b. Al-Ma'mūn and the House of Wisdom
- c. Natural co-existence of science and religion (Al-Kindī: reason central to shed light on revelation)
- d. Opposition to philosophy by traditionalists: Hanbalites and Malikites
- e. 10<sup>th</sup> C: Al-Ash'ari, Al-Ghazālī, and the defeat of philosophy in the East
- f. Cordoba: The new Baghdad?
- g. 11<sup>th</sup> C: Al-Murābitūn contra philosophy
- h. 12<sup>th</sup> C: Al-Muwahhidūn and the revival of philosophy (Ibn Tūmart: the conflict between the philosophers and the theologians could be resolved through recourse to rational principles and arguments)
- i. Philosophers of Spain: Ibn Bajja (d. 1138); Ibn Tūfayl (d. 1185), and **Ibn Rushd**



### **II. IBN RUSHD: LIFE AND WORKS**

- Born 1126
- Studied: Maliki Law and Ash'ari Kalam, philosophy, medicine...
- Met Ibn Tūfayl in Marakesh, 1153
- Met Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf 1169, commissioned by Abū Ya'qūb to write commentaries on Aristotle
- Judge of Seville: 1169-1172; Chief judge of Cordoba: 1172-1182; physician to the royal court as of 1182
- Wrote profusely on Aristotle, as well as on philosophy, medicine, Law...
- 1195: fell from grace and exiled
- Died: 1198

### **III. IBN RUSHD: PHILOSOPHER AND JURIST**

- a. Correcting the errors of philosophers:
  - i. Critique of Al Farabi
  - ii. Critique of Ibn Sina

- b. Defense of Philosophy: ***The Decisive Treatise Determining the Nature of the connection between Philosophy and Religion***
- i. Standpoint of the Law (*sharī'ah*) in relation to philosophy
  - ii. Summary of the argument:
    1. The Law obliges us to study beings and reflect on them
    2. Reflection is only possible through intellectual reasoning, the highest of which is demonstration
    3. This means one has to study the rules and principles of reasoning, various types of arguments, etc...
    4. This means that one has to study the works of those before us who have done work in these matters...
    5. Having gained the skill, one has to now study beings and reflect upon them (back to 1)
    6. This means one has to study what those before us have done in this field (the study of beings) just like with any other field...

**As such: the Law obliges us to study philosophy**
  - iii. Error in philosophy: accidental not essential
  - iv. The differing natural capacities of humans to arrive at assent (*tasdīq*): through demonstrative, dialectical, or rhetorical paths
  - v. The conclusion of the argument for philosophy restated: **the Law commands the study of philosophy to those whose natural capacity is suited to such a study**
- c. Resolving the conflict between The Law and wisdom/philosophy (*Sharī'ah* and *Hikma*)
- i. The truth in religion and in philosophy
  - ii. Allegorical interpretation (of Scripture) as the means of resolving apparent conflict
  - iii. Lack of *ijmā'* (unanimity) in theoretical issues as defense against charges of unbelief
  - iv. Misunderstanding or misrepresenting the view of philosophers as cause for the conflict
  - v. Allegorical interpretations ought not be made public
  - vi. "Injuries from a friend are more severe than injuries from an enemy" (Ibn Rushd in the *Decisive Treatise*, page 18)

#### IV. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS:

- a. Ibn Rushd's defense of Religion?
- b. Philosophy gone quiet: self-imposed silence?
- c. The influence of Ibn Rushd?

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#### Sources relied upon

- Fakhry, Majid, *Averroes: Ibn Rushd : his life, works and influence*, Oxford, Oneworld 2001
- Leaman, Oliver, *An introduction to classical Islamic philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2001
- 2000 بيروت، مكتبة لبنان، الفلسفة العربية: مدخل جديد دعاطف العراقي، تقديم، فصل المقال وتقرير ما بين الشريعة والحكمة من الاتصال، ابن رشد وضبط وتعليق سميح دغيم، بيروت، دار الفكر اللبناني 1994
- When The World Spoke Arabic, Dir. Philippe Calderon, DVD, FIT Production / La Cinquieme, 1999

Central quotations from Ibn Rushd's *Decisive Treatise*:

"If the activity of philosophy is nothing more than study of existing beings and reflection upon them as indications of the Artisan... and if the Law has encouraged and urged reflection on beings, then it is clear that what this name signifies is either obligatory or recommended by law." (p. 2)

"Reflection is nothing more than inference and drawing out the unknown from the known, and since this is reasoning or at any rate done by reasoning, therefore we are under an obligation to carry our study of beings by intellectual reasoning." (p. 2)

"Whether the instrument belongs to one who shares our religion or to one who does not, so long as it fulfills the conditions of validity." (p. 3)

"The art of arts, philosophy." (p. 3)

"Whoever forbids the study of them to anyone who is fit to study them, i.e. anyone who unites two qualities, (1) natural intelligence and (2) religious integrity and moral virtue, is blocking people from the door by which the Law summons them to the knowledge of God... and such an act is the extreme of ignorance and estrangement from God the Exalted." (p. 4)

"Demonstrative study does not lead to [conclusions] conflicting with what Scripture has given us; for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it." (P. 5)

"Extension of the significance of an expression from real to metaphorical significance, without forsaking therein the standard metaphorical practices of Arabic..." (p. 6)

"It is recorded in Tradition that many of the first believers used to hold that Scripture has both an apparent and an inner meaning, and that the inner meaning ought not to be learned by anyone who is not a man of learning..." (p. 7)

"His Knowledge transcends qualification as 'universal' or 'particular'. Consequently, there is no point in disputing about this question, i.e. whether to call them unbelievers or not." (p. 8)

"Anyone of the interpretive class who discloses such [an interpretation] to him is summoning him to unbelief, and he who summons to unbelief is an unbeliever." (p. 12)

"If it were not for the publicity given to the matter and to these questions which we have discussed we should not have permitted ourselves to write a word on the subject; and we should not have had to make excuses for doing so to the interpretative scholars because the proper place to discuss these questions is in demonstrative books." (p. 13)

"Our soul is in the utmost sorrow and pain by reason of the evil fancies and perverted beliefs which have infiltrated religion, and particularly such afflictions as have happened to it at the hands of people who claim an affinity with philosophy... Injuries from people related to philosophy are the severest [to religion]... It (i.e. religion) has also been hurt by a host of ignorant friends who claim an affinity with it: these are the sects which exist within it." (P. 18)