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Ibn-E- Rushd And His Services For Islamic Political And Philosophical Thoughts: Comparative Study Of His Thoughts With Philosophers Of His Era

Dr. Munazza Sultana[1] , Dr. Nida Fatima[2] , Ayesha Iqbal[3] , Dr. Naseem Mahmood[4] , Hafiz Musannif Shah[5] , Dr. Asjad Ali[6]

[1]*Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Thought & Culture, Numl Islamabad*
[2]*Visiting Lecturer, Political Science, Government graduate college for Women Fazilpur, Rajanpur Pakistan*
[3]*MPhil Scholar, Islamic Thought and civilization, University of Management and Technology, Sialkot, Pakistan*
[4]*Department of Islamic Culture & Thought, University of Management and Technology, Sialkot Pakistan*
[5]*PhD Scholar, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan KPK Pakistan*
[6]*Assistant professor, , Department of Islamic Culture & Thought, University of Management and Technology, Sialkot Pakistan*
Corresponding Email: globalwill2021@gmail.com

Abstract

The Andalusian philosopher, physician and judge Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) is one of the great figures of philosophy within the Muslim contexts, and a foundational source for post-classical European thought. The hallmarks of Ibn Rushd's work are his convictions that philosophy is capable of demonstrative certainty in many domains, that it is Aristotle who should be our preeminent guide in philosophy, and that philosophy should play a central role within religious inquiry, rather than being an alternative to religion. But part of what gives his ideas their enduring interest is the subtle way in which he promotes other methods of reasoning and persuasion in contexts where the rigors of Aristotelian demonstration are not a practical option. To grasp Ibn Rushd's thought in full requires attending not only to the Aristotelian commentaries where he attempts to develop philosophy as a demonstrative science, but also to areas like religion, medicine, and law, where constraints of both subject-matter and audience require other argumentative and rhetorical techniques. Often improperly referred to as Averroes—the corrupted form his name took in Latin—Ibn Rushd quickly achieved such prominence in later European thought as to rival the influence of Aristotle himself, whose works Ibn Rushd tirelessly championed. Most modern scholarship orients itself around his reception in Christian Europe, where he was known simply as "the Commentator," and so fails to appreciate Ibn Rushd's own distinctive philosophical achievements.

Keywords: Ibn Rushd, Thoughts, Political Philosophy, Comparison, Services

Introduction

Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd was born in Cordova in 1126. He belonged to an influential Andalusian family, famous for its judicial power and for its scholarship in the religious sciences. His father was a prominent judge, but the most important figure in the family was his grandfather, who also bears his name, Ibn Rushd, and so the philosopher is called "the grandson" (al-ḥafīd) to distinguish him from his grandfather (al-jadd). The latter was both a well-known judge and a famed jurist, being the author

of many books in jurisprudence following the Mālikī school.

Unlike Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd did not write an autobiography, and as a result many aspects of his life are obscure and will remain so unless new documents are discovered. The limited information we have from his biographers unanimously agrees on his good conduct, his diligence in science, and his fairness as a judge, while noting his interests in philosophy and his adoption of certain "audacious" views. The surviving historical sources tell us much about his teachers in the religious sciences, but, with the exception of medicine, we know little about those who taught him in other fields. He was certainly not a disciple of either of his famous Andalusian contemporaries, Ibn Bājja or Ibn Tufayl, although he read their philosophical works. (Puig 1992 and Ben Sharīfa 1999 discuss the intellectual circles around Ibn Rushd.)

Ibn Rushd was 22 when the Almohads came to power in the western Maghreb and Andalusia. Given that the Ibn Rushds had been prominent in circles close to the previous Almoravid dynasty, it was imperative for the grandson to express in his writings, and perhaps even in person, his commitment to the new rulers and the Almohad creed (daʿwa) conceptualized by Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130). Some surviving testimonies suggest that Ibn Rushd did in fact adopt Ibn Tūmart's creed at some point in his life (see Ben Sharīfa 1999).

Given the social position of his family, Ibn Rushd soon found himself in the ruling circles of Marrakesh and close to the princes, or at least some of them, in Andalusia. He engaged in debates on philosophical and theological issues with this inner circle, and there is a record of a meeting with Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (r. 1163–84), the second Almohad ruler, who officially asked Ibn Rushd to comment on Aristotle's works and render them accessible. Later he became chief physician to the caliph in Marrakesh.

Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd's relationship with the Almohad creed was complex and seems to have evolved (Geoffroy 1999; Ben Ahmed 2020c). Recently discovered revisions to his al-Kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla contain paragraphs where Ibn Rushd shows a sort of critical distance towards Ibn Tumart's creed. These paragraphs, when added to his harsh criticism of the Almohads in his commentary on Plato's Republic, may help us understand the evolution he underwent during his intellectual life. They may shed light in particular on the disgrace he suffered at the end of his career, when, for reasons that remain unclear, he fell out of favor with the Almohads and was exiled in Lucena, 60 km southeast of Cordova. According to one account, his death took place while he was confined to a residence in Marrakesh in 1198. (The definitive biography, in Arabic, is Ben Sharīfa 1999. For more on the historical context see Urvoy 1998 and Ben Ahmed 2020c.)

Contributory Services

Ibn Rushd remained productive for at least four decades. He was the author of a large corpus that extends over medicine, logic and philosophy in all its branches, including natural philosophy, astronomy, metaphysics, psychology, politics, and ethics. His work also includes the sciences of Islamic religion: jurisprudence (fiqh), the foundations of Islamic law (usūl al-fiqh), the foundations of religion (usūl al-dīn), and the science of the Arabic language, including grammar. With important exceptions, most of his works are available in the original Arabic. For those works that have been lost, while readers await the day of their rediscovery, they must generally make do with medieval translations in Hebrew or Latin.

Ibn Rushd's work deploys various methods and styles. Many treatises are in the form of a commentary, most famously and extensively on Aristotle—covering nearly the whole Aristotelian corpus—but also on Galen's medical treatises, as

well as on other philosophers such as Plato, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Bājja. Many other treatises, devoted to specific issues, are not in commentary form. (For a detailed inventory of texts and translations see §10.1.)

The focus of his commentaries was Aristotle because no one has yet surpassed his achievement: "no one who has come after him to this our time—and this is close to 1500 years later—has been able to add a word worthy of attention to what he said" (LongPhys proem; Harvey 1985, 83). Scholarship going back to the nineteenth-century has divided the commentaries into three kinds:

- the epitome or short commentary (jawāmiʿ), which he favored at the start of his career;
- the paraphrase or middle commentary (talkhīṣ), seemingly composed throughout his career;
- the literal or long commentary (sharḥ or tafsīr), dating to his later years.

Inasmuch as Ibn Rushd routinely wrote different kinds of commentaries on the same Aristotelian treatise, some such distinction seems necessary. But recent scholarship has doubted whether this neat threefold distinction adequately captures Ibn Rushd's complexly varied approach (Al-ʿAlawī 1986a; Druart 1994; Gutas 1993). At a minimum, it omits important categories of work, such as compendia (mukhtaṣarat), treatises (maqālāt), and answers to questions (masāʾil), to say nothing of the important treatises that focus on religious questions.

The most prominent of those independent religious treatises are

- The Decisive Treatise (Faṣl al-Maqāl), an argument for the value of philosophy to Islam;
- The Incoherence of the Incoherence (Tahāfut al-Tahāfut), a direct response to al-Ghazālī, whose work had achieved considerable influence at the time in Andalusia (Di Giovanni 2019);
- The Exposition of the Methods of Proof concerning Religious Doctrines (al-Kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla fī ʿaqāʾid al-milla), a philosophically nuanced alternative to the teachings of Ashʿarite theology.

These works, which seem to have had little influence on medieval Christian thought, have traditionally been seen as "theological" and contrasted with his supposedly "philosophical" works: the commentaries on Aristotle that circulated throughout medieval and Renaissance Europe in Latin and Hebrew translation. The latter were thought to be demonstrative, and aimed at the elites, whereas the former were said to be merely dialectical, and so aimed at a popular audience. Accordingly Ibn Rushd's true position supposedly had to be sought in these Aristotelian commentaries.

This distinction has affected the direction of scholarship, causing great attention to be given to the "philosophical" works, which were thought to represent most truly his thought, and leaving the "theological" treatises to be comparatively neglected. Even where the latter are widely taught, they are set apart from his supposedly more philosophical commentaries. The result, ever since the initial research of Renan (1852), has been a segmented and fragmentary view of the Rushdian corpus that marginalizes important aspects of his thought.

An important correction to this tendency appears in Jamal Al-Dīn Al-ʿAlawī (1986a), who defends the unity and coherence of the Rushdian corpus. He proposes that Ibn Rushd's works form a unity where there is no room to distinguish between

what is a commentary on another text and what an ostensibly original work is. With this, Al-ʿAlawī attempted to close a gap in a body of work that should rightly be seen as continuous, and to reconnect texts that have been disassociated from their contexts.

Rational and Reasoning

The general character of Ibn Rushd's philosophy is illuminated by his overarching picture of logic. Most broadly, he understands it as the study of the conditions and rules that rightly guide the mind toward the conception (taṣawwur) of essences and the assent (taṣdīq) to propositions (CompLogic 1.1). Glossing Aristotle's famous remark that "it is the mark of the educated person" to seek the appropriate level of precision in any inquiry, Ibn Rushd clarifies that the educated person is "one who has been instructed in the art of logic" (ParaEthics I.3, 3C).

In keeping with the weight he accords the subject, Ibn Rushd commented several times on each work in Aristotle's logical Organon. Near the start of his career, he wrote a Compendium of Logic that includes Porphyry's Isagoge and follows the usual Arabic practice of including the Rhetoric and Poetics as part of an expanded Organon (Black 1990). Later, he wrote a series of longer paraphrases of this same corpus (but treated the Isagoge separately, on the grounds that it is neither an introduction to nor even a part of logic). Toward the end of his life, he devoted one of his five long commentaries to the Posterior Analytics.

In line with the approach of his predecessors, Ibn Rushd divided logical processes into five types of argument: demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, poetical, and fallacious. These inferences are not distinguished by their forms, which are the same, but by their matter, that is, by their premises. The premises of demonstrative arguments are necessary (Thom 2019), the premises of dialectical arguments are generally accepted, the premises of rhetoric are generally received, the premises of poetic arguments are imaginative, and the premises of sophistical arguments are deceiving.

For Ibn Rushd, the center of logic and its very purpose is demonstration, for it is the only procedure that leads to certainty in philosophy: it is "the most perfect kind of reflection (naẓar), using the most perfect kind of inference (qiyās)" (Decisive Treatise 3). Accordingly, even in the context of Plato's Republic, he begins his commentary by announcing that his goal is "to abstract such scientific arguments attributable to Plato as are contained in the Republic by removing from it its dialectical arguments." However, this does not mean that non-demonstrative arguments are useless. Generally, where one kind of argument is not effective, other kinds of arguments should be used. Dialectic offers a path toward demonstration and to science, which, although it does not obtain certainty, is close to it. Rhetoric contributes, through its paradigms and enthymemes, to reinforcing and promoting demonstrative evidence. The study of sophistical reasoning is useful in assessing the faulty argumentative methods of the theologians (the mutakallimūn, that is, practitioners of kalām).

In light of the high status of demonstration, Ibn Rushd considered it with great care in his commentaries. He devoted a compendium, a paraphrase and a long commentary to the Posterior Analytics—which he calls the Book of Demonstration (Kitāb al-Burhān)—and wrote separate treatises on various special issues. The long commentary is probably the most appropriate text for his positions on the components of demonstration, its types, and its role in producing scientific knowledge. That commentary is also the occasion for a critical and severe interaction with the two Islamic authorities in logic before him, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

The purpose of examining demonstrative arguments is to understand the absolute demonstration that gives complete certainty and constitutes a science (LongPostAn I.7 {180}). There are, however, other kinds of demonstration, less certain than the absolute one, but still demonstrative. In all, Ibn Rushd distinguishes three types (LongPostAn I.95 {348}):

- an absolute demonstration (burhān muṭlaq), which establishes the existence of a thing on the basis of a cause that is known prior to its effect;
- a demonstration of existence (burhān al-wujūd), which he calls a sign (dalīl), which establishes a thing's existence without any grasp of its cause (see Elamrani-Jamal 2000);
- a demonstration of the cause (burhān al-ʿilla or burhān al-sabab), which establishes the cause once the effect's existence is known. (Al-ʿAlawī 1986b)

Philosophical Thoughts

The previous section followed the order of discovery, beginning with what is better known to us. Here we start with what is causally prior, and so begin with the First Cause. (On Ibn Rushd's method of inquiry see Cerami 2015 ch. 7.) Although the existence of some kind of First Cause was undisputed, religious and philosophical authorities disagreed about the nature of creation. The most common view was that the world came into existence, from God, after having not existed, but Ibn Rushd follows Aristotle in supposing that the world has always existed, eternally. His strategy for explaining how an eternal world can have a First Cause turns on distinguishing between two kinds of causal orderings, essential and accidental.

Causes that are essentially ordered are simultaneous, such that the prior stages are a condition for the effect's ongoing existence, as when waves move a ship, the wind moves the waves, and the wind is moved by elemental forces (QPhys 7.25 {235}; Incoherence I.1 {59}). In such a series there must be a first cause, because an endless such series would be actually infinite all at once, which Ibn Rushd regards as impossible (Incoherence I.4 {275}). The series could, moreover, never reach its end, since causal agency cannot pass through an infinitely long series in a finite time (LongPhys VII.6; QPhys 7.25 {235}). This First Cause cannot itself be something in motion, given the Aristotelian dictum that everything that is in motion must be moved by another (LongPhys VII.1; QPhys 7.30 {236}). In principle, Ibn Rushd allows that there could be many unmoved movers (QPhys 7.35 {238}), but at a minimum there must be one such thing that is immovable, and eternally so, because otherwise some still prior mover would be required to move the supposedly first mover, and this would lead again to an essentially ordered infinity of movers (EpiMeta 4.139 {126}). (For the intricate details see Twetten 2007.)

An accidental ordering takes place over time, as when rain comes from a cloud, the cloud comes from vapor, and vapor comes from a prior rain (Incoherence I.4 {268}). Such an ordering is circular, inasmuch as the materials from one stage are corrupted and reused in a later stage, and so there is no threat of an actual infinity. There is thus nothing incoherent about such a series extending infinitely far into the past and infinitely far into the future, and indeed Ibn Rushd argues that such an infinity can be proved in various ways (Davidson 1987). One fundamental proof arises from the nature of the First Cause. Since it is itself unmoved—that is, wholly changeless—its causal agency must likewise be eternal. "A thing lacking the potential for change and alteration cannot be changed at any time, since if

it were then its alteration would be by cause of itself, and so there would be alteration without the possibility for it" (LongCaelo I.103). It is, for Ibn Rushd, incoherent to posit an eternally existing, changeless actuality, which suddenly springs into agency after having not acted for an eternity. In general, "the effect of a cause cannot be delayed after the causation" (Incoherence I.1 {15}). Similar considerations show that the world's future existence must likewise be eternal (Incoherence 1.1 {22}).

For the reasons just rehearsed, an eternal and unchanging First Mover entails an eternal and unchanging first thing moved, and observation suggests that this must be the outermost sphere of the stars, whose diurnal rotation in turn moves everything within its ambit: "there is a moved thing that is first by nature, which moves the whole, and which terminates every movement whose mover is external…. The mover of this [first] moved thing is, of itself, not a body and is absolutely and essentially unmoved" (EpiPhys 8.242 {141}). Past this first ceaseless motion, the causal story becomes increasingly complex, under the influence of the celestial intelligences. Ibn Rushd is suspicious of the unrealistic convolutions of Ptolemaic cosmology, preferring to honor the principles of Aristotelian physics even where that leaves a gap between theory and observation (Sabra 1984; Endress 1995). A strikingly personal remark describes how he had once aspired to close that gap, but has now, in his old age, abandoned the project (LongMeta XII.45 {1664}). Anticipating the modern rise of scientific specialization, he yields the field to those who devote themselves solely to this one science (LongMeta XII.48 {1679}).

The spheres move eternally in majestic circles simply because it befits their lofty existence to do so (EpiMeta 4.152 {140}, LongMeta XII.36 {1595}, Incoherence I.15 {484}), but these motions have a subordinate effect of signal importance to us: they sustain the very existence of our sublunary world. Most basically, the motion of the celestial spheres—although they are not themselves hot (SubstOrb 2.95)—gives rise to heat in the fiery region immediately beneath the lunar sphere, and from heat and its contrary, cold, arise the four elements: earth, air, fire, water. "The existence of the celestial body entails necessarily the existence of the elements … as preserving, efficient, formal, and final cause" (EpiMeta 4.171 {161}; Incoherence I.3 {261}). The bodies that furnish our sublunary realm are various elemental mixtures, in which the elements themselves endure in an attenuated state, as the material strata above prime matter (EpiMeta 1.48 {32}; LongCaelo III.67; EpiGC I.121 {22–3}; see Maier 1982 ch. 6). The qualities of these elements—hot, cold, wet, dry—"are the causes of all natural things that come into being and pass away" (Incoherence II.1 {525}). The entire system so depends on the celestial spheres that "if the motion of the heavens were destroyed, … the world in its totality would be destroyed" (SubstOrb 4.117; Kashf 5.112 {191}).

Matter is, at least potentially, infinitely divisible, but at the level of elements and mixed bodies we can refer to the smallest body capable of still being a body of that kind—the minimum naturale—e.g., "the minimal possible magnitude of fire" (EpiPhys 7.212 {114}, Glasner 2009 ch. 8; Cerami 2015, 429–36). Any sort of mixed body requires a substantial form to actualize it, but Ibn Rushd's view of how such forms emerge evolves. His early works hold that, at least at the level of living things, substantial forms cannot be generated by wholly natural processes, but require a celestial "giver of forms," the Agent Intellect (EpiMeta 4.171 {162}). His later view is more thoroughly naturalistic, and argues that prime matter contains the potentiality for all substantial forms, which need only be actualized by a natural agent, along with the usual cooperation of the celestial bodies (LongMeta VII.31 {883}, XII.18.109 {1499};

see Davidson 1992 ch. 6; Freudenthal 2002; Cerami 2015 chs. 8–9).

Ibn Rushd's naturalistic conception of generation and corruption is of a piece with one of his most famous philosophical stances, his rejection of al-Ghazālī's occasionalism. On this theological tradition, "when a man moves a stone by leaning against it and pushing it, he does not push it, but it is the Agent who creates the motion" (LongMeta XII.18.112 {1504}). Ibn Rushd heaps scorn on this view in the Incoherence, resting his case most fundamentally on the link between a thing's causal role and its defining nature: "it is self-evident that things have essences and attributes that determine the special functions of each thing and through which the essences and names of things are differentiated. If a thing did not have its specific nature, it would not have a special name nor a definition, and all things would be one" (II.1 {520}). (For discussion of this argument see Kogan 1985 ch. 3.)

Thoughts about Philosophy of Religion

Ibn Rushd believes that God's existence can be demonstrated through a complex argument from Aristotelian physics, establishing the existence of a first cause (see §5). As with physical arguments in general, the argument is a mere sign (dalīl), starting from empirical features of the world that are better known to us even if causally posterior (LongMeta 12.5 {1423}; see §2) He rejects the a priori metaphysical arguments of Ibn Sīnā (Davidson 1987 ch. 10; Bertolacci 2007) and of the Ashʿarite theologians (Kashf 1), all of which he thinks not only fall short of being demonstrative but also fail to be persuasive to ordinary people. For them, one should follow the example of the Qurʾān and deploy arguments from design (Kashf 1.33–38 {118–22}).

In keeping with Aristotle's remarks in Metaphysics XII.7, Ibn Rushd suggests that God serves not as an efficient cause, but only as a final and formal cause. Efficient causality prevails among natural bodies, when one actually moving body brings another body from potential to actual motion. The heavenly bodies, however, are already actual, and eternally so, and so in this domain efficient causation has no place (PossibConj 14.86). The relationship of First Cause to the celestial spheres, then, is that of intelligible to intellect—that is, the eternal thoughts of the First Cause are the forms that serve as final causes inspiring the celestial intelligences (LongMeta XII.36 {1592}; XII.44 {1652}; LongCaelo IV.1.654; Incoherence I.14 {481}; Conjunction Epistle 1, par. 3-4). God, being wholly immaterial, cannot directly act on the sublunary material realm at all, but plays a causal role only through the mediation of the celestial spheres: "the temporal cannot proceed from an absolutely eternal being, but only from an eternal being which is eternal in its substance but temporal in its movements, namely, the celestial body" (Incoherence I.13 {467}). (Interpretation here is more contentious than this brief summary suggests. For various approaches see Kogan 1985 ch. 5; Davidson 1992, 227–30; Adamson 2019; Twetten forthcoming.)

God alone, among intellectual beings, has no further object of intellectual contemplation that might serve as his final cause. On the contrary, "the First Form thinks of nothing outside itself" (LongAnima III.5 {410}; EpiAnima 219 {93}; EpiMeta 4.158 {147}; LongMeta XII.51 {1700}). This helps account for God's unique simplicity as a pure mind, always fully actualized by nothing other than God. It leads to questions, however, about the sense in which God can be said to have knowledge of the created world. This is "the most powerful doubt" regarding this conception of God (EpiMeta 4.159 {148}), and it threatens to lead to the view al-Ghazālī had branded as heretical: that God does not know particulars (Incoherence II.4 {587}). Ibn Rushd denies that he is committed to this consequence. God has knowledge of the created world in his own manner, neither in universal nor particular,

not as if his thoughts are caused by the world, but rather as the cause of the world (Incoherence I.3 {226-7}, I.13 {462}; Ḍamīma 7; LongMeta XII.51 {1707–8}). The divine mind's "thinking its own self is identical with its thinking all existence" (Incoherence I.11 {435}).

For terms to apply to God and creatures in a non-univocal way (bi-ishtirāk) is a common state of affairs for Ibn Rushd (LongMeta XII.39 {1620–4}). It arises, for instance, not just in the case of knowledge but also in the case of will. For, since God "is exempt from passivity and change," He does not exercise will in the usual sense of the term (Incoherence I.3 {148}). Still, in another sense God is "an intending and willing agent" (Kashf 5.80 {163}) in virtue of the special causal relationship that God has to the world. Similarly, Ibn Rushd affirms, in a special sense, that God is the creator of the world (QPhys 3; Kashf 5.78–91 {161–173}), and that God exercises providence (ʿināya) over all existent beings, though he denies that any individual enjoys a special divine providence (LongMeta XII.37 {1607}, XII.52; EpiMeta 4.176–81 {166–71}). It is difficult to assess the degree to which, on this account, either God's will or the world is necessitated (Belo 2007; Hourani 1962; Taylor 2014).

The various strands of Ibn Rushd's conception of God are set out on one hand against Ibn Sīnā's insufficiently Aristotelian philosophy, and on the other hand against Ashʿarite theology (kalām). His systematic examination of the Ashʿarites in al-Kashf establishes at length that their methods are sophistical and delusional, drawing on two basic resources: the intention of Islamic law and Aristotle's philosophy (Arfa Mensia 2019). But even where Ibn Rushd is examining the mutakallimūn and offering rival interpretations of religious texts, it is not his intention to set philosophy at the service of any kind of theology. Instead these writings are more appropriately classified as philosophical considerations on religious texts and theological issues.

Prophecy is a good example of how Ibn Rushd distinguishes himself both from the theologians and from previous philosophical approaches (Taylor 2018). The trustworthiness of prophecy is foundational to Islam: "the sending forth of prophets is based on the fact that revelation comes down to them from heaven, and on this our religion is based" (Kashf 4.58 {142}). The Ashʿarites had relied primarily on miracles to establish the veracity of the Prophet Muhammed. Ibn Rushd evaluates this approach from his Aristotelian background. His first step is to situate the miraculous (muʿjiz) as a tool of persuasion belonging to the art of rhetoric, standing to the prophetic claim as an extrinsic argument (Ben Ahmed 2012). Analogously, when I swear that something is true, the oath I advance has no intrinsic connection to what is claimed as being true. The Ashʿarites conceive of the relation between being prophetic and a miracle as that of a quality to its act. The miracle must be, in principle, an act that is generated from that quality, just as the act of healing the sick emanates from the quality of being a physician (Kashf 5.95–6 {177}). Accordingly, the proof that I am a prophet is that I can produce an extra-ordinary act, such as walking on water, turning a stick into a snake, or splitting the moon. Ibn Rushd responds by identifying a miracle as merely "an external sign" of prophecy. The act that more closely demonstrates prophecy is to establish a law that is useful for people. Thus it is the Qurʾān that proves Muhammad's veracity: "Because of the universality of the teaching of the Precious Book and the universality of the laws contained in it—by which I mean their liability to promote the happiness of all mankind—this religion is common to all mankind" (Kashf 5.103 {184}). A miracle alone, in contrast, is at best complementary, and an argument from miracles

is merely persuasive or rhetorical. (See further Arfa Mensia 1999, Ben Ahmed 2012).

Political and Moral philosophy

The sciences, for Ibn Rushd, fundamentally divide into the theoretical (naẓarīya), which is aimed at knowledge (ʿilm), and the practical (ʿamalīya), which is concerned with voluntary action (Republic I.21; LongPhys proem). The chief practical science is politics, which Ibn Rushd sees as dividing, much like medicine, into a more theoretical and a more practical part. The first and more theoretical part examines voluntary actions in general, their associated dispositions (the virtues and vices), and the relationships between these elements. The second, more practical part examines how these dispositions become established within souls and how they are perfected and impeded (Republic I.21). The first part is found in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, and the second part in his Politics. Although Ibn Rushd composed a commentary on the first of these, and although he knew the second was available in Arabic elsewhere, he complains that it "has not yet reached us on this peninsula" (ParaEthics X.160G). Accordingly, he chose to comment on Plato's Republic as an alternative source for the second part of political science.

Following the Nicomachean Ethics, Ibn Rushd takes the goal of human life to be happiness (Hourani 1962). For ordinary people, the ultimate guide to happiness is the Qurʾān, which exhibits miraculous wisdom in the rules it sets out to promote human flourishing (see §6.1). But the ultimate human happiness, for those who are capable of it, is to become perfect in the theoretical sciences (LongPhys proem). Such perfection arrives when human beings conjoin themselves to the separate Agent Intellect, which is to say that they pass from a partial conception of intelligible objects to a conception of the Agent Intellect itself. At this point a human being in some sense takes on an "eternal existence" (PossibConj 5.41; LongPhys proem), and is "made like unto God" (LongAnima III.36 {501}), and even "becomes one of the eternal, incorporeal beings" (PossibConj 5.40). This notion of conjunction (ittiṣāl) had a complex history among earlier Aristotelians, and Ibn Rushd's views about what it involves, and whether it is possible, developed over time (Davidson 1992, 321–56; Black 1999). The texts here are complicated, but suggest that he rejected al-Fārābī's complaint that conjunction is nothing other than "an old woman's tale" (PossibConj 14.85; Epistle 1 par. 40), and that he accepted it as, in some sense, the goal of human life, one that would be achieved through contemplation, with the assistance of prayer and the Qurʾān (PossibConj 15.103–4).

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