

A Medieval Muslim Scholar's Influence on European Renaissance

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For almost a thousand years of the Christian era, the scientific progress in Europe remained dormant and all scientific progress came to a halt. Any scientific theory not mentioned in the Bible was discarded and labeled as heresy. Scientists were condemned, incarcerated, and some even put to death. This period is called the "Dark Ages". Indeed these were the "dark ages" for Europe but not for the Muslim world.

The Muslim holy book, Quran emphasizes to observe, reflect, and use rationality to understand the world they live in and Islam also encourages the intellectual pursuit. By the 7th century, the Muslim Arabs had established rule in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, India, Asia Minor, and Andalusia. They were exposed to the Greek, Byzantine and Indian culture and were keen in acquiring knowledge of Greek, Roman, and Indian sciences. They translated all the known scientific work from Greek to Arabic, thus preserving the ancient knowledge from extinction. However, their major contribution was their original work in all sciences. Between the 7th and 13th centuries, Baghdad in the East and Cordoba in the West were the most advanced cities in the world and became seat of learning where students from all over the world flocked to have the most advanced education. Hoffman writes: "The European intellectuals exploit of the Renaissance would have been unthinkable without the famous Muslim scientists, philosophers and scholars such as: Al-Razi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Al-Bairuni, Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Haiytham, and Ibn Khaldoun."^{Hoffman Murad}

Ibn Rushd (Averroes), a twelfth century Muslim philosopher whose master piece work was the commentary on Aristotle's philosophy and emphasis on reasoning and rational thinking has made a considerable impact on Medieval European intellectuals. The rise of Renaissance rationalism and humanism is associated with Ibn Rushd's emphasis on the primacy of reason in philosophical and theological discourse. Writing about rationalism, Etienne Gilson mentions: "Rationalism was born in Spain in the mind of an Arabian philosopher as a conscious reaction against the theologians of the Arabian Divines - Asharites." Averroës promoted the ideal of a purely 'rational philosophy' even more comprehensive than the mathematical rationalism of Descartes (1650) who is generally regarded as the father of modern philosophy.^{Fakhry 2000}

Abdul Waheed, Muhammed Ibn Ahmed, Ibn Rushd known as Averroes in the West, was born in Cordoba in Southern Spain in 1126 and is regarded as one of the pioneers in philosophy and medical sciences. He grew up in the period of turmoil in Muslim history, when the Crusades had begun and Al-Andulas (Muslim Spain) was splintered into numerous kingdoms. However Muslim Spain remained the center for learning arts and sciences and continued to attract scholars from all over the world. While Europe was in the Dark Ages, the Muslim Spain, especially the city of Cordoba was the most advanced city in the entire European continent. Scholars of different faiths, found Andalusia as a tolerant center for people of all faiths namely Christians, Jews, and Muslims and an intellectual common ground, leading to scientific discoveries in the Medieval Islam, which became the most advanced civilization. Ibn Rushd did his major philosophical work during this period and is regarded as the central link between Ancient Greece and European Renaissance.

Ibn Rushd mastered the Islamic Shariah under the supervision of his grandfather, who was a well-known jurist of the Maliki School of Islamic Law and Qazi-al-Quzzat (Chief justice) in Cordoba. Ibn Rushd himself became the Qazi (Justice) in Seville (1169-72) and Chief Qazi (Chief Justice) in Cordoba (1172-82). He also studied astronomy, medicine, Greek sciences, and music, but his most outstanding accomplishments were in the areas of medicine and philosophy.

Views of Ibn Rushd, in the 12th century on the status of women are still true in the 21st century. In his book, "the Moors in Spain and Portugal," Jan Reed cites from Ibn Rushd's commentary on the status of women: 'Our society allows no scope for the development of women's underlying talents; they seem to be destined exclusively for child birth, and the care of children. This state of servility has destroyed their capacity for larger matters. They live their lives like vegetables, deviling themselves in their husbands. From this stems the misery that pervades our cities for women who outnumbered men, and cannot procure the necessities of life by their own labor.'^{Salloum 1997}

Ibn Rushd, known for his hospitality, was a kind and considerate man who abhorred position and wealth. As a judge, he was very kind hearted and seldom awarded corporal punishment. He engaged in scholarly activities 16 hours per day even when he was 70 years old. A patriot, Ibn Rushd claimed, Spain as rival of Greece praised by Plato in his Republic.^{Ahmed 1987} He agreed with Plato's ideas of social order, and stated that man must be free from all oppression and injustice... He considered the rule of Khulafa ar Rashidun as the ideal for humanity, and criticized Mua'awiya for introducing the dictatorship and monarchy in Islam.^{Haque 1990} In year 1148, Alm'wahadin captured Andalusia and declared Marrakech (Morocco) as their capital. The developed the city into a center for learning and Ibn Rushd was appointed as Inspector of Schools of Marrakech in 1153 where he started his philosophical and medical work. He wrote one hundred books on philosophy, medicine, and astronomy, including a treatise on the motion of a sphere and sunspots.

Ibn Rushd recognized as the brilliant philosopher till the Renaissance, his commentaries on Aristotle's work were used as textbooks of philosophy in the West, entitling him as the father of Western philosophy. Michael Scotts translated Ibn Rushd's work on Aristotle from Arabic into Latin, thus introducing Averroës, the interpreter of Aristotle to the West, including the universities of Paris, Prague, Padua and Oxford, A department was established under the name of Averroës in the University of Paris. Francis Bacon honored him as being at midpoint between Aristotle and Ibn Sina and he advised all to study his essay in Arabic to avoid faulty translation.^{Haque 1990}

According to George Sarton, "he was great because of the tremendous stir that he made in the minds of men for centuries." A history of Averroism includes all essential elements of the thought process from 12th to 16th century and Ibn Rushd's work was regarded as the last word on philosophy. Dante in his Divine Comedy calls him the greatest commentator of Aristotelian work. Ibn Rushd became an authority among both Jews and Christians and his commentaries on Aristotle influenced such Jewish theologians such as Moses Ibn Maimon (Mamonides 1135:1204) and Christian theologians, Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great. When Ibn Rushd's works started to spread in Europe in the early 13th century, they were received with much enthusiasm and curiosity. Even the Roman Catholic Church started exploring ways to permit Christians to study books written by non-Christians, which were banned at the time. However in the late 13th century, several Christian philosophers (Siger of Brabant, Boethius of Dacia and Bernier of Nivelles) who started and followed Averroism were condemned as heresies in Paris,

and Dante was accused of Averroistic heresies and his book *De Monarchia* was burned by the order of the Pope.

The study of philosophy was also discouraged in the Muslim world during the time of Ibn Rushd, partly for political reasons. As political power declined in the Muslim world, Muslim rulers sought more and more the aid of theologians. This is the major reason why Khalifa Al-Mansour ordered to burn the philosophical works of Ibn Rushd and condemned him on the charges of heresy and deported him from Cordova.^{Shaikh 1962} This was the city where Ibn Rushd held the highest judicial position of Qazi (chief justice). Later on when Al Mansour re-established his power in Spain and returned to Marrakech, Ibn Rushd was restored to grace and the charges against him were rescinded. He died in 1198 in Marrakech and three years later, his body was exhumed to be buried in Cordova.

Ibn Rushd- Physician: The famous philosopher and court physician, Ibn Tufail, introduced Ibn Rushd to the Caliph, Abu Yaqoub Yusuf. After the death of Ibn Tufail in 1182, Ibn Rushd succeeded him as a personal physician to the Caliph and subsequently became physician to his son, Abu Yaqoub Al-Mansour in 1184. He became an authority on medicine during his time. He wrote 20 books on medicine covering several topics related to illness and health. His best-known work on medicine was 'The Compendium of Medical knowledge' (*Kitab al kulliyat fil tib-colligete*). It consists of seven volumes on anatomy, physiology, pathology, diagnosis, pharmaceuticals, therapeutics, and hygiene. This book brought together the work of the best physicians from the Classical Greek and the Islamic world. The Compendium of Medical Knowledge (*Kulliyat*) was translated into Latin (colligete) in the late Middle Ages (13th and 15th century) became one of the textbooks of medicine taught both in the East and the West for several centuries.^{Stone 2003} Ibn Rushd defines medicine in *al Kulliyat* as "an effective art, based on true principles and concerned with preserving men's health and abating diseases, as far as possible, in dealing with individual bodies. Thus the aim of this art is not to heal necessarily, but to do what ought to be done to the extent possible, and within the time and space needed." (*al Kulliyat* p.19) Ibn Rushd was well recognized for his work on smallpox. He stated that this disease does not affect more than once, showing that individuals develop immunity after their first exposure. He advised segregation of patients with smallpox to avoid spread of the disease. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) also wrote a treatise on medical jurisprudence.

Ibn Rushd (Averroes)-The Philosopher: Caliph Al-Mansour once asked Ibn Rushd: "What do the philosophers believe regarding heaven? Is it eternal or created in time?" Taken by surprise, Ibn Rushd denied that he was engaged in the study of philosophy."^(Fakhry 2000) However, that question from the Caliph sparked the philosophical instinct, and eventually led to his interest in philosophy and he became a renowned philosopher. Ibn Rushd made a lasting impact with the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy in his own original work on reasoning, and the relationship between philosophy and theology. For Ibn Rushd, philosophy was no more than the systemic probing into phenomenon of creation, and revealing God's wisdom, leading to truth. He strongly believed that an in-depth study of philosophy could enable man to have a better understanding of the Quran and Islam. His thought-provoking books on philosophy had a serious impact not only on Muslim philosophers and thinkers, but also on Jewish and Christian philosophers and scholars of the time, such as Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas.

Ibn Rushd adopted Aristotelian reasoning by analogy and found it suitable for rational deduction, influence, prosecution, and judgment, not only on issues of life, but also in religious affairs including realization of God. He applied rational reasoning to theology-an approach that stirred his colleagues against him and against his philosophy as a whole.^{Leaman}

Ibn Rushd wrote 3 books on systematic philosophy- *Fasl al Maqal*, *Kitab al Kashf*, and *Tahafut al Tahafut*:

I. Fasl Al Maqal- The Decisive Treaties- published in 1177. In this book, he discussed the creation and eternity of the universe, destiny of man, nature of the knowledge of God, immortality of the soul, and resurrection. Ibn Rushd emphasized the study of philosophy and science, and in support of his arguments, he quoted verses from Quran such as “Reflect, you have a vision” and “Have they not studied the knowledge of the heavens and the earth and whatever things God has created?” These verses encourage man to explore nature in search of Divine Providence. Ibn Rushd also interpreted from these verses that: God requires man to obtain demonstrative knowledge of His existence. He did not deny any dogma of Islam, but interpreted it in his own manner so as to bring it into conformity with the philosophy.

Eternity- Ibn Rushd made a distinction between eternity of the God and eternity of the world. He also mentioned 2 kinds of eternities: Eternity with a cause and eternity without a cause. God is eternal without cause. He exists solely in timeless eternity. The world is eternal because the Creator is working upon it. God’s creative power is perpetually at work in the world, moving it and maintaining it. ^{Sheikh 1962}

Knowledge of God- Ibn Rushd stated that God in the knowledge of his own essence knows all things of the world. God’s knowledge is not like that of man; it is a higher form of knowledge about which we have no conception. Our knowledge is limited to only what God permits us to have, and God’s knowledge like man is not derived from things rather things derive their being through God’s knowledge of them. God’s knowledge can be called neither universal nor particular, as this distinction is of human origin. ^{Rosenthal 1985}

Human Destiny- Ibn Rushd clarified his perception of human destiny by stating that human actions depend partly on his free will and partly on outside causes. These causes spring from general laws of nature, and God alone knows their sequence. He believed that man is neither in full control of his destiny, nor is it fully pre-determined for him, therefore man should make utmost efforts to attain perfection, and this perfection can only be attained through study, speculation and negation of desires especially those relating to the senses. ^{Ahmed 1987}

Immortality of the soul- Ibn Rushd states that soul is a driving force like an energy, which sustains life and affects the growth of the organic bodies. This sole being independent of the body may continue to exist after the death of the body in an individual capacity. Ibn Rushd believed in the resurrection of the body. However his interpretation of resurrection may be different from that of theologians. He explains that the body that is resurrected may not be the same as our body now. Our physical bodies are dissolved after death but we may receive new celestial ones in a resurrection and those would hold our reconstituted individual souls. The immortal life of the Hereafter will be of a higher kind than this life. ^{Sheikh 1962}

II. Kitab al Kashf- “Exposition of the Method of Proofs”- In this book, Ibn Rushd outlines his system of doctrine for Muslims who are not philosophers and refuted many erroneous teachings of the theologians. He argues that the highest form of demonstrative reasoning cannot clash with the principles of religion. Philosophers are best able to understand properly the allegorical passages in the Quran on the basis of their logical training and there is no religious stipulation that all such passages have to be interpreted literally. When demonstrative reasoning appears to conflict with the sense of Scriptures, then those capable of demonstration (the philosophers) know that the passages must be reinterpreted allegorically so as to cohere with demonstrative truth. Religion is a means for the easy comprehension of the majority of the people and when a hidden meaning exists, it is up to the philosophers to discover it and keep it to

themselves while the rest of the community must accept the literalness of the Scripture. ^{Raslan 1997} He gave the example of a statement in the scripture: "God is in the Heaven." In a literal sense, it means somewhere in the skies. We know that God cannot be represented as a physical entity in space and would interpret this statement to mean that God is exalted above all that is earthly and human, and we know that God is everywhere and not merely in the heavens. The philosophical explanation or interpretation of Quran may be confusing and may mislead common people, instead of enlightening or guiding them. Therefore, Ibn Rushd states that philosophers should not share their interpretations with the masses so as to avoid confusion.

Ibn Rushd categorized people based on their understanding. The largest group consisted of those who developed faith because of the teachings of Imams. The second group consists of people who have faith in the religion, partly upon reasoning, but largely on the uncritical acceptance of the teachings of theologians. The third and smallest group have a faith in religion due to reasoning and rationality. They thoroughly examine the dogma, and accept it. These are philosophers whose understanding reaches its highest level.

Ibn Rushd was criticized for saying that an interpretation of dogma according to the intellectual level of the people is necessary. Ibn Rushd believed that some truths can be presented in different forms to different individuals based on their understanding. He showed psychological insight of human perceptibility. The Quran says: "Those who are firmly grounded in knowledge, say: 'We believe in the book; the whole of it is from our Lord and none will grasp the message except men of understanding.'" (7:3)

III- Tahafut al Tahafut- "Incoherence of Incoherence"- His major work on philosophy was published in 1184. This book was written as a response to Imam al- Ghazali's serious criticism of the philosophers, Ibn Sina and Al Farabi. Al-Ghazali wrote 'Tahafut al Falsafa' (Incoherence of Philosophers) in which he found serious problems with philosophers of his era. He wrote: "They have abandoned all religious duties Islam imposes on its followers." He mentioned that the kind of reasoning used by philosophers would never result in the proof of existence in God. ^{Maqtoub 1997} However, in response to these accusations, Ibn Rushd emphasized that certain doctrine about God must be accepted in Toto, such as the existence of God as Creator and Sustainer of the world and the resurrection of the body on the Last day. Ibn Rushd quoted Quranic verses as proof of his belief: For it is evident from more than one verse in the Book of God-Al Mighty that He calls upon men to believe in the existence of the Originator, glory be to Him, and 'O people, worship your Lord who has created you as well as those who came before you' and as the other sayings of the Almighty: 'Is there any doubt about God, Maker of the Heavens and the Earth?' ^{Najjar 2001}

Ghazali criticized the work of Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina by saying that philosophers purport to prove that philosophy is a more sophisticated analysis of the nature of reality than that available to ordinary Muslims. On the contrary, the philosophers are creating a doubt in the religious notion of God, the life after death, and the creation, in the guise of merely analyzing these ideas.

Ibn Rushd presented two arguments against strict believers in doctrinal reasoning. The first argument targeted the notion that rational reasoning is heresy because it did not exist in the early days of Islam. His argument was that though doctrinal reasoning did not exist then and was only introduced later, it is not considered heresy. He further argued that the mind is the ultimate tool of knowledge, prepared as it is by God to deduce His presence and to reason in earthly matters as well. This divine qualification renders the human mind continuous in space and time and opens across all nations to a common knowledge. "Therefore, we must make use of the

teachings of those who preceded us whether they share our religious beliefs or not,” Ibn Rushd was referring to the Greek philosophers. ^{Raslan 1997}

Ibn Rushd (Averroes)- The Commentator- Ibn Rushd admired Aristotle and showed great respect for him. He discussed his theories analytically more than any other philosopher, and regarded him as a seeker of truth.

For a thousand years, the West had almost forgotten the contribution of Greek philosophers. There was a strong belief that philosophy refutes Christian dogma. It were Muslim philosophers who translated Greek philosophical works in Arabic, and then re-introduced to Europe through translations. The major credit goes to Ibn Rushd who wrote commentaries on Aristotle’s work, and the Latin translation of his work was introduced to Europe. His works made a major impact on European philosophical and theological circles. A great number of students followed the school of Averroism, and an academic department of Averroism has also been established in Paris and Oxford.

Ibn Rushd spent over 25 years writing on works of Aristotle. He wrote an in-depth analysis of Aristotle’s work in 3 books: Summary (*Jami*)-written for beginners, Middle Commentaries (*Talkhis*), and Long Commentaries (*Tafsir*), written for advanced students and philosophers. In these Commentaries, he also included his own opinions. It was through these books translated into Latin and Hebrew that he became known as ‘The Commentator.’ Translations in Latin were made from the Hebrew translation of Averroes’ (Ibn Rushd) works by Samuel Bin Tibbon, and Joseph Bin Abar Mare of Naples. ^{Fakhry 2000} His books were taught in new universities of Europe for the next 4-5 centuries. He wrote commentaries on several books of Aristotle including *Organon*, *Meteorologica*, *Poetica*, *Nicomachean*, and *Ethica*. He also wrote commentaries on Plato’s *Republic*. While Ibn Rushd’s commentaries had a serious impact on Western scholars and stirred their dogmatic thinking, it had virtually no effect on Muslim scholars in the East. They were gradually shifting towards Orthodoxy and Abundant progressive thinking.

Ibn Rushd (Averroës)- The Renaissance Man: The 12th century produced the most outstanding scholars of Andalus in Muslim Spain, such as Avempace (Ibn Bajja), Ibn Tufayl and Moses Maimonides who had considerable influence on Europe. However, Ibn Rushd’s ideas influenced the transformation of thought in Medieval Europe and his beliefs had a serious impact on the minds of many medieval intellectuals living in Europe for the next few centuries.

The rise of Renaissance rationalism and humanism is clearly linked to Ibn Rushd’s commitment to the primacy of reason in philosophical and theological discourse. Writing about rationalism, Etienne Gilson mentions: “Rationalism was born in Spain in the mind of an Arabian philosopher as a conscious reaction against the theologians of the Arabian Divines - Asharites.” Averroës promoted the ideal of a purely ‘rational philosophy’ even more comprehensive than the mathematical rationalism of Descartes (1650) who is generally regarded as the father of modern philosophy. ^{Fakhry 2000}

Muslim and Christian theologians were concerned about Ibn Rushd’s writing especially his work on Plato’s *Republic* where he discusses how society can be changed and developed to perfection. They wanted to see the order of the world as pre-ordained, and immutable. It was Ibn Rushd’s text that inspired thinkers of the Renaissance such as Thomas Campanella, and Sir Thomas Moore to produce utopia or the ideal state. The notion that this ideal is something definable and that it can be attained through human endeavor and wise leadership, rather than

only as a matter of God's Grace, and more good luck has inspired reformers and socially-conscious governments to the present day. ^{Stone 2003}

Initially, Ibn Rushd's writing had a negative effect on Christian schools as his rational approach was regarded incompatible with Christian teachings. This is the same reason why his philosophical teachings were rejected in the Muslim world. However his philosophical writings were greatly appreciated, and accepted later on by Christian philosophers and scholars, and have raised the conscience of European intelligencia. For nearly four centuries from the 12th to the 16th, his writings were subject to repeated dialogue among the scholars in Christian Europe- forcing the church to modify its teachings. In contrast, Muslim scholars and theologians out rightly rejected his ideas.

Hundred years after the death of Ibn Rushd, a group of scholars known as Averroists, whose principal exponent was Siger of Brabant, openly declared themselves as adherents of Averroës sparked another controversy within the Roman Catholic Church. ^{Salloum 1997} Averroists were charged that they promoted the doctrine of intellect for all humans, denial of the immortality of soul, and promoted the idea of double-truth meaning two kinds of truths; religious and philosophical. ^{Ahmed 1987} Siger of Brabant, Boethius of Dacia and Bernier of Nivelles were condemned for Averroistic heresies in Paris, and Dante was also accused; and his book *De Monarchia* was burned. ^{Turner 2003}

Ibn Rushd introduced reasoning and rationalism in both Jewish and Christian dogma. A great Jewish physician-philosopher and rabbi, Ibn Maimun (Moses Maimonides) was born in the city of Cordoba about 10 years after Ibn Rushd. He was very much influenced with the writing of Ibn Rushd and became the master of Aristotelian philosophy. He also attempted to harmonize the truth of reason with the revelation of Torah. Maimonides is considered a most respected and enlightened Jewish philosopher with marked influence on Jewish thinking. Maimonides' writings also generated considerable controversy among the Jews. His books were, in consequence burned by Orthodox Jews. However his philosophical writings supported Ibn Rushd's concept of harmony between reason and religion prevailed and influenced European thinking.

Thomas Aquinas was born in Naples, Italy about 25 years after Ibn Rushd. He was a monk who subsequently became a professor of theology in Paris, and advocated Ibn Rushd's rationalism. He was also opposed by theologians. In 1231; Pope Gregory appointed a commission to expurgate his writing. He was also charged with heresy. However, he used grand commentaries on Aristotle as his model. Although he refuted some of the arguments of Ibn Rushd, he always spoke with respect and regard towards Ibn Rushd. Thomas Aquinas was instrumental in incorporating Aristotle's rationalism in Christian theology. His famous book: *Summa Theologia* is considered the most comprehensive exploration of the Christian philosophy. Aquinas emphasized that faith and reason will not contradict Christian revelations. This argument in general was accepted by scholars and enlightened theologians and had a profound impact on rationalism and humanism, which then became the basis of Renaissance.

The three great scholars of medieval period: Ibn Rushd, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas each had a great influence on Islam, Judaism, and Christianity respectively. During the 12th century, when revelations without reason were the principle dogma of theologians, these great scholars advocated understanding revelation by reason and logic and this was a great challenge. Because of their bold approach, they also faced condemnation from the contemporary theologians of their respective religion, who strongly supported orthodox views.

It has been suggested among scholars that Ibn Rushd's work may have been inspired by the desire to prove that man is rational and can learn, that nature is intelligible and its interpretation a legitimate task of man and hence, science and divine revelation need not be at odds. Part of this philosophy is derived from the Greeks, especially from Plato and Aristotle, whom Ibn Rushd admired and on whose work he wrote numerous commentaries and paraphrases in books that to a large extent won him the respect he enjoyed in the West, whereto struggle to reconcile science and faith still goes on. ^{Stone 2003} It is said that without the work of the Muslim philosopher, Ibn Rushd, much of what occurred in Medieval Europe in the field of philosophy would not have existed.

The late Pope John Paul VI recognized St. Thomas Aquinas' important role by pointing out that St. Thomas recognized that nature, philosophy's proper concern, could contribute to the understanding of divine revelation. Faith, therefore has no fear of reason, but rather seeks it out and has trust in it. He further acknowledges the influence of Muslim and Jewish scholars on St. Thomas. Certainly Pope was referring to Maimonides and Ibn Rushd (Averroës). Ibn Rushd's philosophical writings symbolized intellectual and religious freedom and Muslim society is still struggling to establish it.

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