

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) - 1128-1198 C.E.

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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 1128 and is regarded as one of the pioneers in philosophy and medical sciences. 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, namely Christians, Jews, and Muslims found Andalusia as a tolerant center, an intellectual common ground, leading to scientific discoveries in the Medieval Islam. Ibn Rushd did his major philosophical work during this period and is regarded as the central link between Ancient Greece and European Renaissance.

Both his father and grandfather were prominent judges. His family was well known for scholarship and it inspired him to excel in learning. He studied religious law, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy. He studied Islamic philosophy from Abu J'afar Haroon, Ibn Baja and Ibn Tufail. Ibn Rushd served for ten years as a judge (Qaadi) in Seville and later in Cordova. During this period he translated and abridged Aristotle's book "**de Anima**" which was translated into Latin by Mitchell Scott. He also wrote commentaries on other works of Aristotle.

Ibn Rushd was a deeply religious man. He writes, "Anyone who studies anatomy will increase his faith in the omnipotence and oneness of God the Almighty." The depth of his faith and knowledge of the Quran and the prophetic traditions are reflected in his writings.

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

I Fasl Al Maqal - 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.

Knowledge of God- Ibn Rushd stated that God 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.^{Ahmed 1987}

II Kitab al Kashf- 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.^{Raslan 1997}

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, in his book “The Incoherence of the Philosophers”

Ghazali criticized the work of Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina by saying that philosophers try to prove that philosophy is a more sophisticated analysis of the nature of reality than that available to ordinary Muslims. 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 emphasized that demonstrative reasoning does not lead to disagreement with what the divine law has brought forth. For truth does not contradict but agrees with and is a witness to it.

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 Averroes commentaries on Aristotle as his model. Although he refuted some of the arguments of Ibn Rushd, he always spoke with respect and regard towards him. 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 in the West, where to 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.

Ibn Rushd has been held as one of the greatest thinkers and scientists of the twelfth century. According to Philip Hitti, Ibn Rushd influenced Western thought from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. His commentaries were used as standard texts in preference to the treatises of Aristotle in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. His books were included in the syllabus of Paris and other Western universities till the advent of modern experimental sciences.

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