
Ibn Rushd's Philosophy and Religion: A Comprehensive View

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Abstract: *This paper examines Ibn Rushd as a philosopher, who justified his claims with special reference to Qur'an. He talks of nature of the matter, God and man. He holds reason as lynchpin in understanding nuances or secrets of being that in combination prove man as created and God as creator, man as subordinate and God as all super being, above all, never perishable and ever eternal. God as the super being does not occupy matter or materialistic complexion. To Ibn Rushd, God is independent in his all issues and is beyond the rational faculty but reason in the universe supports the quest of realizing His attributes which distinguish Him from His own creation. Knowledge for him is all the reality of his eternity, the mode of which is possible owing to reason of true origin. Reality, possibility, validity and reason along with other abstracts are as whole or partly given prominence in Ibn Rushd's thought of philosophy and religion.*

Keywords: *creator, never perishable, ever eternal, materialistic complexion, independent, attributes, knowledge.*

I begin with a famous statement by Averroes:

"There is no city that is truly one other than this city that we are involved in bringing forth."¹

Averroes or Ibn Rushd as one of the greatest Islamic philosophers, who influenced the whole all strata of Islamic tradition and the rest, based his philosophy on the Quranic principles for Knowledge which is only the way of reaching the realization of God as everything. He argued that the Shari'a not only permits but obliges us to study and reflect on things with the intellect, by virtue of reason in order that one can reach to perfection in demonstration in syllogism. Here I would like to mention a famous quotation by John Bartlett attributed to Ibn Rushd "Knowledge is conformity of the object and the intellect."² He defended the application of philosophy that was denied by Al Ghazali in his ever debatable book "The Incoherence of the Incoherence." The thought that exploration of causations as an inter existing constituent of knowledge of God as he is the cause of recognition that potential beings in strong activation was as whole affirmed by him against Al-Ghazali and the rest. To him, the existence of mystical state and the faculty of intuition or not all to pave way to know the God as was held by Al-Ghazali.

Ibn Rushd as seemed is in demand of greater effort and courage to seek knowledge than that of western philosophers. In the times of Ibn Rushd the philosophy in relation to religion and knowledge was brisk discussion about which Rushd wrote "An Authoritative Treatise and Exposition of the Convergence which exists between the Religious Law and Philosophy." As experienced by European philosopher he could not find any completion and contradiction. Ibn Rushd came up with solution to the problem between faith and reason, and between qualitative methods with which the analogous truths to be transmitted and transferred. He held that knowledge put into demonstration is highly commendable and can be received by those only of exceptional intellect and ethics which are only the philosophers.

In the horizon of Ibn Rushd philosophy he considered that religion and faith teach those very essences which defer only in the manner expressing themselves and so anybody can follow and get in lighted by Shari'a. As such, religion is absolute necessity and obligation as it leads the man towards real wisdom in universal form. He did exempt jurists from his critical pain for the glory of Islamic canon.

He holds that it is only philosophy that provides complete comprehension of heavenly truths and religious Law. Man's perfection can be achieved only by undergoing speculative application by through stages and in same manner

¹ Ralph Lerner Averroes on Plato's Republic(1974) p.24

² Bartlett, John Familiar Quotation (1968) p.155

moral virtue and conduct. All kinds of perfection do exist in speculative nature so can be acquired in the same nature. Here Ibn Rushd categorized men according to their intellectual features and this categorization gave existence to Epistemological Theory.

Onwards, it is treated that philosophers because of their unmatched sense of knowledge and understanding are the richest able interpreters of the Qur'an and Shari'a, also of religious code and Law. Ibn Rushd rejected Shafi's view, long prevalent in Jurisprudence and widely established in Islamic discourse as a whole, that right and wrong are determined not by the nature of what they are but by divine law. He followed Aristotle assuming firmly that goodness and evil are useful and hazardous, beautiful and ugly. There is something that is there as natural and not conventional. He upheld Aristotle's application to moral thinking of a distinction between nature law, by which things are prescribed and forbidden because they are good or bad in themselves, and positive laws, by which things are prescribed and forbidden on the authority of a legislator. To understand rightly, therefore, one must employ 'rational inference (qiyas 'aqli)' as well as analogy in the Jurisprudential sense (qiyas shar'i). Sure this is what can be said contrary to the law in forbidding this kind of examination. One must conclude, therefore, that the Deputy has a duty to protect philosophers and their writings.

Ibn Rushd's intellectual project was to elucidate and complete Aristotle's oeuvre. Aristotle was of supreme importance, first, because he relied exclusively on conceptual analysis and syllogistic demonstration: 'philosophy' meant the strict interpretation of Aristotle and adherence to his method shorn of neo-Platonic accretions. Secondly, Aristotle covered every aspect of what could be known. Ibn Rushd set out to realize his project in two ways. First, he sought by textual analysis to purge Aristotle's texts of neo-Platonic material. His achievements in this field are still admired by modern scholars; he was the first Muslim philosopher to recognize the importance of the differences between Plato and Aristotle. Secondly, he attempted like Farabi and Ibn Sina to complete Aristotle's oeuvre by adding knowledge gained in Islamic times. This especially concerned matters of law and social organization. Ibn Rushd composed three different types of commentary on Aristotle, aimed at people's differing intellectual abilities: Short Synopses, Written c.1160-70; *Intermediate Commentaries* written c.1168-77, in which he introduced some of his own opinions, and the *Great Commentaries* (1180-90). It was thus that he earned his reputation in Latin Europe as 'The Commentator'.³

Ibn Rushd was keenly interested both in the study of Theology and Philosophy. In theology he wrote two great treatises "A decisive discourse on the agreement of Religion with Philosophy" in Arabic "Fasl al-Maqal wa Taqrir ma bayan al-Shari'ah wal-Himkah min al-Ittisal" and "An exposition of the method of argument of the doctrines (dogmas) of religion" (in Arabic) Kitab al-Kashf an Manahij al-adillah. He actually believed that there was no difference between religion and philosophy. Philosophy must agree with religion. This was the cherished will of all the Muslim philosophers, though at times it seemed that there was some deviation of philosophy towards atheism, but not true. He pointed out that the job of philosophy is to acknowledge and approve and commend for the Holy book sowing that God does command, the people to find out truth. Thus unknown or ignorant are those who are afraid of free thought because of knowledge imperfect. This results that truth of philosophy possesses nothing but contradiction with religion. Religion of the masses mere partially demonstrated Divine essence for the moral progress of the society. There is no restriction for the philosophers who have attained knowledge to interpret the word of God in Qur'an. Religious percepts and philosophy are in harmony with each other. They are related as practice and theory. Philosophy does not reject religion. It is rather the highest form of truth and the most sublime religion.

In religion, Ibn Rushd makes classification of men in three different kinds. The philosophers holding religion and demonstration belong to the highest great and those who have attained no rationalization in their beliefs yet above in argument in defending their faith belong to second kind. The lowest group belongs to those people whose faith is based on the authority. They blindly follow their religious dogmas and avoid any sort of discussion. It is mischief and misguidance to put reason before such people.

Ibn Rushd was an advocate of freedom of thought in religion. But he wants to bring Islam in reconciliation with Aristotelianism. Ibn Rushd opposed the scholastic orthodox religious scholars who were regarded overturning religious principles of Aristotle wisdom.

³ Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political thought, From the Prophet to the Present* Second Edition

Thus in discussing the classification of three classes of men, Ibn Rushd links philosophy with apodictic demonstrative discourse, theology with dialectical discourse and religion professed by the multitudes with rhetorical discourse. According to him, the Quranic terms such as “Wisdom” exhortation and altercation refer to philosophy, religion (rhetoric) and theology (dialectic) respectively. Theologians resort not only to dialectics, but to sophistry as well while religion in dealing with the ‘multitudes makes use of both rhetorical and poetic arguments which are often not clearly distinguished.

According to one of the thesis, “a study backed by proof does not contradict what religion has provided, for truth does not oppose itself to truth, but corresponds to it and is but another argument in its favour” and that “philosophy is a companion and a foster sister of religion”. Perhaps Ibn Rushd wants to say that philosophy can not contradict religion because truth can not contradict truth”.

As such philosophy has no right to challenge the position of religion because it is a regulator of our moral and social life in society. Similarly religion should not oppose through the theologians dialecticians, the truths revealed by philosophy.

Religion, in fact, poses no danger for the welfare of society and benefit of mankind but the religious scholars, through their ‘interpretations’ and dialectics may endanger society, create problems of plunging it into mutual hatred, alienation and war which have actually so often happened and continue to happen.

Ibn Rushd believed that philosophers should abstain from understanding the religious concepts which are dominant in society. The views of the philosophers are not generally comprehensible to the “multitude”. They should publicly share their only those views with masses which are harmless and popular but the question is how far they may conceal their own mind, it may be objected to Ibn Rushd.

In discussing the relation between philosophy, religion and theology, Ibn Rushd clearly seems to accept the priority of reason over faith. Reason does not allow following faith in a blind way in accepting only its literal meaning. After comparing the views of Ibn Tufail and Ibn Rushd on this topic, Arthur Saqadeyev, summarizes in the following which is quite interesting and informative to note.

“To my mind, he was right in observing that it is only philosophy which can interpret religion in right spirit without bias and prejudice. It is in this way that we may remove injustice, violence and barbarism still being committed in different parts of the world. Can we bring Rushdian thought once again after lapse of four hundred years to bring peace in the world ‘Might is right’ will be the only way in the world.”⁴ In words of C.A. Qadir, “Philosophy cannot be killed by philosophy itself because demolition of one philosophy gives birth to another philosophy, the criticism of philosophy is philosophy itself.”⁵

According to O’Liver Leaman, “Ibn Rushd (Averroes) theory of ‘double truth’ was misunderstood in the west as stated that something could be true in philosophy but false in religion at the same time. Both religion and philosophy reach the same truth but by two different routes. But such a theory which suggested that religion and philosophy could both be true and yet result in contrary conclusion, was held to be controversial since it meant that religion could not be rationally justified, while philosophical truths are irrefutable. Ibn Rushd has, however, tried to show that religion and philosophy are compatible not contrary. Leaman further says that the radical aspect of Averroes’s thought played an important role in the philosophical curriculum of the west through the medieval and Renaissance periods, and provided with the essential backdrop for the development of modern philosophy in the west.”⁶

“Ibn Rushd believes like his predecessors Ibn Bajja and Ibn Tufail that religion gives the truth but only in allegorical sense. The scripture gives allegorical interpretation of truth in abstract and cannot be easily understood by the masses. So the common man is taught in such manner that he may be capable to understand only the literal

⁴ Ashraf, Ehsan, *The Philosophy of Ibn Rushd*, Adam publishers & distribution, New Delhi, 2010 p.46

⁵ Ibid. p.75

⁶ Ibid. p.76

meaning of the scripture. Religion's main purpose is to induce morality for the multitude. The religious truth as understood by the masses is not the full truth as understood by the philosopher. The philosophers interpret the same truth in more rational way and deep thinking. Philosophy is meant for elite only so that it may not confuse the masses. Thus Ibn Rushd holds the view that religion and philosophy differs not in content but only in expression of the same truth."⁷

O'Liver Leaman writes: "It is the not task of the philosopher to drive theological and ethical conclusions from his demonstrative reasoning. Religion must follow philosophy in ways that will be acceptable to the masses."⁸

Averroes thinks that every prophet is a philosopher in himself and that philosopher is not a prophet. All people are not able to interpret Qur'an. Only those people good at demonstration can undertakes such a complex task. Still there are some doctrines regarding the existence of God which need be kept under consideration and accepted too like God existence, He as creator and sustainer of all the worlds, faith in the resurrection of the body in the world hereafter, etc. Ibn Rushd did not find rift between the philosophy and the religion. Rather believed that philosophy existed in the depths of revelation and truth is discovered by philosophers through logic which can be exposed even figurative language as in scriptures. "All that is wanted in an enquiry into philosophical reasoning has already been perfectly examined by the Ancients. All that is required of us is that we should go back to their books and see what they have said in this connection. If all that they say be true, we should accept it and if there be something wrong, we should be warned by it." He also believes that all fallible existences or of matter and form were as so is a form of perfection in the phenomena of humanity. On the grounds of these unique thoughts he was condemned as the one not believer in individual soul.

Ibn Rushd lays stress on the point that religion gives direction itself to the public and instruction is as important as for philosopher in class which is taken up within is specific religion. "The religions strive towards the same goal as philosophy, by means of a path that is accessible for all; therefore, according to philosophers, they are necessary. Because philosophy plays its role as master of bliss only for part of the intelligent people, namely those who study philosophy; the religions, on the other hand, have the intention of educating all people without exception. Seeing as the particular class (of philosophers) does not exist and cannot reach its happiness without participation of the general class, general instruction is necessary for the existence and the life of the particular class. As for as childhood and upbringing is concerned; no one doubts this. As for the time when it passes to its particular state, it is necessary for achieving excellence that it does not turn away from that in which it was raised and that it uses the best interpretations. It must realize that religious education it aimed towards the majority and not towards the elite. In case it expresses its doubts regarding principles of the religion in which it was raised, or if it brings forward an interpretation that is contradictory to what the Prophets teach, and leads them off their way, in that case, the person who does such things, deserve to be branded as a disbeliever and should be punished with the punishment which is intended by his religion for the godlessness."⁹

As Badawi emphasizes its concern with the Quranic principle about Christians, people the Jews and other followers of book, he also supplemented that even though it is true to the philosopher, he needs to opt the best one. "That is why the philosophers who taught in Alexandria converted to the Islam when the Islamic Law came to them and the philosophers who came to live in Roman land converted to Christianity when the religion of Jesus came to them".¹⁰

In one of his masterpieces in theology is "al-Kashf" Ibn Rushd tackles the questions concerning with God's existence, attributions of Him and creation of the world. He explains, assert that God's existence is known exclusively from Scripture or accredited report (sam) and give their assent to it on the basis of faith. Reason has nothing to do with this knowledge, according to them.

This question according to Averroes, as held, contrariwise, that God's existence is known through reason. Their best known argument rest on two premises:1) that the world is temporal or created in time (haditb),and 2) that this

⁷ Ibid. p.76

⁸ Ibid. p.93

⁹ Tahafut Altahafut, Pp.582-3 ed. Bouyges, Badawi, Pp.783-4

¹⁰ Tahafut Altahafut, p.583

temporality is a corollary of the fact that bodies are composed of indivisible practices or atoms and accidents, which like those bodies are temporal or created in time.

“Averroes criticizes this argument on two grounds. First, it entails that the Maker (Muhdith) of the world is either temporal or eternal. If the former, then He will need a prior maker and that maker a prior maker and so on ad infinitum. If this Maker is said to be eternal, then his action in producing the created world would be eternal.”¹¹

According to Averroes, to recognize that willing and doing or making, as applied to God, are entirely distinct; so that if we suppose the world to be created in time, then the action giving rise to this world would be in time.¹²

The second major argument for the existence of God, developed by a leading Ash'arites theologian, Al-Juwayni teacher of Al-Ghazali, is from contingency ultimately affiliated to Avicenna. According to this argument, whatever exists in the world could have been otherwise than it is, larger or smaller, higher or lower, more or less; and being contingent it must be temporal. For Averroes, the whole concept of contingency, on which this argument rests, is purely rhetorical and flies in the face of the evidence of our senses. It also impugns the wisdom of the creator. He then comments that the root of the difficulty is that Ash'arites denied that God is the author of speech, since this would render Him a bearer of the accident of speech, asserting instead that speech is an eternal attribute subsisting in God, like knowledge, power and life.

With regarding two attributions that of hearing and sight Ibn Rushd is explicit to accredit to God, in so far as His knowledge embraces all cognitions, rational or other, on the one hand, and in so far as He is the Creator of the hearing and sight, and accordingly is conversant with them, on the other. This, he states without much ado, is the measure of knowledge (pertaining to this subject) that Scripture has explicitly called for, as far as the general public is concerned.

Prof. (Dr.) Ehsan Ashraf has gathered important points on Ibn Rushd philosophy on the existence of God in words of Majid Fakhry: “The Attribute of Knowledge belongs to God eternally but the mode of its bearing on created entities is unknown to us. Consequently we are not justified in asserting is that God knows the coming to be of created entities or their passing away either through an eternal or temporal mode of knowledge. Between the Divine and the Human (created or temporal) modes of knowledge there is no proposition, since, where God’s knowledge is the cause of the object known, human knowledge is the effect. If so, then Avicenna (Ibn Sina’s) view God had a universal knowledge of particulars must be rejected on the ground that universal and particular are categories of human being not divine knowledge. In fact the mode of God’s knowledge, being entirely transcendent, can only be known by God Himself.”¹³

CONCLUSION

To conclude it’s clear that Ibn Rushd discussed that the claim of Muslim theologians is that philosophers are outside the circles of Islam, have no substantial proof. He challenges Asharites, Mutazalites and Sufi who except something and reject a few domains of religion and philosophy like knowing the attribution of God. He supports natural intelligence mixed with religious integrity in approaching to know the Metaphysical as well as the worldly issues. He holds demonstrated truth never conflicting with the God’s word the Qur’an. In establishing God’s existence he explain attribute challenging Asharites that there cannot be two gods for any disagreement would entail that one are both can be God. In his work Epistle Dedicatory and decisive treaties believes that divine knowledge is the outcome of cause and God being the cause of universe possesses knowledge based on being its cause and therefore man acquires knowledge based on the effects of those cause. Divine will and power are considered the essential features of God because the existence of any created being implies the existence of the subjects that sought existence and had the power to do.

¹¹ Fakhry, Majid, *Averroes His Life, Works, and Influence*, Oneworld Publication, Oxford, 2001, p.75

¹² Al-Kashf, p.136 Cf. Tahafut al-Tahafut, p.150

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