



Ibn Rushd: The Andalusian Philosopher and His Intellectual Works

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Abstract

Ibn Rushd (520–595 AH/1126–1198 AD), also known as *Averroes* in the Latin West, stands among the most influential philosophers of the Islamic intellectual tradition. His life and thought have been the subject of extensive scholarly debate, particularly regarding his philosophical positions and his relationship with Islamic theology. This article revisits Ibn Rushd's biography, intellectual formation, and major works, with a particular focus on his philosophical method and his views on the relationship between reason and revelation. By revisiting his original writings, the study aims to clarify misconceptions and highlight about Ibn Rushd's enduring contributions to Islamic and global philosophy.

Keywords: Ibn Rushd, Averroes, Islamic Philosophy, Aristotle, Reason and Revelation, Andalusian Thought.

Introduction

Ibn Rushd stands among the most distinguished intellectual figures of the Islamic world, particularly in the Maghrib (Morocco) and Al-Andalus (Spain). His philosophical, juridical, and medical contributions have generated extensive scholarly debate, often accompanied by divergent interpretations of his intellectual orientation and the historical circumstances. Therefore, a careful return to his original writings is necessary to accurately assess his positions and distinguish them from later assumptions and ideological readings.

His Life and Intellectual Formation

Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd was born in Cordoba in 520 AH/1126 AD. He was known as Averroes in medieval Europe. He belonged to a prominent family renowned for its scholarship and judicial authority. His grandfather served as Chief Judge (Qāḍī al-Quḍāt) of Cordoba and Al-Andalus, issuing influential legal opinions within the Mālikī school, while his father also held judicial office. Biographers have therefore distinguished between Ibn Rushd the grandfather, father, and grandson, the philosopher.

Ibn Rushd mastered theology (Kalām), jurisprudence (Fiqh), Qur'ānic exegesis, Hadīth, medicine, natural sciences, and mathematics. He served as a judge in Seville and later in Cordoba, while increasingly devoting himself to philosophy, in which he attained exceptional distinction.

His close association with the Almohad court began when the philosopher-physician Ibn Tufayl introduced him to Caliph Abu Yaqub Yusuf. According to historian Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakushi, the Caliph's first question to Ibn Rushd

concerned the philosophical debate over the eternity or createdness of the heavens. This encounter marked the beginning of his intellectual service at the Almohad Court.

At Ibn Tufayl's request, Ibn Rushd undertook the task of commenting on Aristotle's works, which were regarded as obscure. His commentaries clarified the Aristotelian doctrine and ensured its systematic transmission. However, court rivalries and accusations of heresy led the Caliph Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur to exile him to Lucena near Cordoba an episode later known as the "Ordeal of Ibn Rushd." After approximately one year, he was pardoned and reinstated to his former position. He died in Marrakesh in 595 AH/1198 AD, and his body was later transferred to Cordoba, an event reportedly witnessed by Ibn Arabi.

His Major Works

Ibn Rushd's works may be classified into three main categories: Philosophical, Religious, and Scientific.

1. Philosophical Works

His philosophical corpus largely consists of commentaries on Aristotle, including works on Metaphysics, Physics, On the Soul, Categories, and On the Heavens and the World. He also authored *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), a critical response to al-Ghazali's *Tahāfut al-Falāsafa*.

2. Religious Works

Among his major Islamic writings are as follows:

- Faṣl al-Maqāl (The Decisive Treatise on the Harmony between Religion and Philosophy)
- Al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adillah (Exposition of the

Methods of Proof)

- Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid, a significant Mālikī legal manual.

3. Scientific Works

His scientific contributions include the following:

- Al-Kulliyāt fi al-Ṭibb (*Generalities in Medicine*)
- A commentary on Ibn Sina's medical poem
- A summary of the Almagest in astronomy

Ibn Rushd first became renowned for his commentaries on the works of Aristotle, earning him the title "*The Commentator*." His writings were translated by numerous scholars into Latin during the Middle Ages, and also into Hebrew. Some researchers have raised the question: Did Ibn Rushd possess independent philosophical views, or was he merely a transmitter of Aristotle's doctrines? A careful study of his commentaries and summaries reveals that he was both faithful to Aristotelian philosophy and intellectually independent. At times he supported the views of the "First Teacher" (Aristotle), while at other times he expressed his own views.

These works are classified into three categories:

- Detailed commentaries (Tafsīr), such as *Commentary on the Metaphysics*
- Summaries (Talkhīs), such as Summary of the Book on the Soul
- Abbreviations or compilations (Jawāmi), such as *Compendium of Natural Sciences*

His Intellectual Position

Ibn Rushd adopted a comprehensive and critical methodology in his commentaries on Aristotle, consulting all of Aristotle's works and comparing various translations to ensure accuracy. While remaining largely faithful to Aristotle, he exercised independent judgment, offering critique where necessary. His detailed commentaries were intended for specialists, whereas his summaries aimed to make Aristotelian philosophy accessible to a wider audience.

He sought to harmonize Aristotelian philosophy with Islamic doctrine, integrating Qur'ānic principles and defending philosophy against theological criticism. In *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, he responded to Al-Ghazālī's accusations against Muslim philosophers, arguing that issues such as the eternity of the world, causality, and the soul are open to interpretation and do not justify charges of disbelief.

In *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, Ibn Rushd further affirmed the compatibility of philosophy and Shari'ah, maintaining that rational inquiry is permitted in Islam and that true philosophical reasoning cannot contradict revealed truth. For him, both philosophy and religion share the same ultimate goal: the pursuit of truth.

Conclusion

Ibn Rushd's philosophy had a profound influence on the Western world, giving rise to the movement known as Latin Averroism during the Middle Ages, as his works spread across European universities. However, since his Islamic writings were not translated into Latin, his intellectual position was often misunderstood, and some western thinkers misrepresented him as an overly liberal or even quasi-atheistic philosopher. This led to criticism from figures such as Thomas Aquinas and Ramon Llull.

In the Islamic world, Ibn Rushd was respected as a philosopher, jurist, and physician until the time of Ibn Khaldun, after which his influence declined during the period of intellectual stagnation. His thought re-emerged in the

modern era, when his works were edited, published, and widely studied, leading to the development of a renewed Islamic Averroism and a more accurate understanding of his true philosophical position.

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