

Editorial

Remembering Ibn Rushd

This year is the 800th anniversary of Ibn Rushd's (1128–1198) death. Our editorial is dedicated to his memory as a great Muslim scholar. His legacy is one of the greatest contributions to human understanding and intellectual scholarship. The occasion deserves much more than an editorial. This issue reports on a conference celebrating Ibn Rushd's achievements and later this year *AJISS* will have a report on the seminar that the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) is organizing in Amman, Jordan, honoring his work. In this editorial I will try to clarify Ibn Rushd's place in Islamic Intellectual history and underscore his contributions to the development of philosophical, theological, and scientific thought in the Muslim and Western worlds.

Although Ibn Rushd has an important position in the Islamic intellectual legacy, his contributions have not received due recognition in the Muslim world. Even among those who are aware of his works, to a great extent, he has been misunderstood and misrepresented, and his position has undergone multiple distortions. We feel it is essential to understand his work free of historical and contemporary ideological biases and distortions in order to fully comprehend the problems and concerns that motivated Muslim scholars and provided the framework for Islamic thought. It is also important that we understand the reasons why he was not given the place he deserves in the Islamic heritage and why he is often misinterpreted.

Ibn Rushd was a great integrator of knowledge. He was a preeminent physician and a prominent judge of his time. He was also a philosopher and theologian. His mastery of knowledge demonstrated two dimensions—he was both encyclopedic and specialist. In the areas of his specializations—medicine, jurisprudence, and philosophy—he was a master without peer. Ibn Rushd had two outstanding qualities. He was extremely intelligent and he was also extraordinarily just and fair in his approach to religion. It is important that we understand and appreciate his unprejudiced approach to the study of religion. Indeed, it is one of his most distinctive qualities.

Ibn Rushd was a committed Muslim and a very humble man. This humility manifests itself in his writings as well as in his methodology. His search for truth allowed him to explore all sources, including early Greek philosophers. He believed that we must examine all sources, even

if they are foreign. He was quick to appreciate the contribution of others, and reluctant to condemn any of them for their ideas. He always sought to prove what was right. He believed that those who were right deserved the *ajr* (reward) for their efforts and those who were wrong must be excused. Needless to say, resorting to *takfir* (declaring scholars deniers of the truth [*kafir*] if their ideas departed from the dominant understanding of the deen) did not sit well with him.

He saw the Greek philosophical tradition as necessary, as long as it did not contradict shari'ah, particularly in those areas where they reached partial truth. He believed that the philosophic arguments were acceptable because their positions were laid out in universal terms and, therefore, were imminently understandable to all people. In this belief, Ibn Rushd was not very different from Al-Ghazali, who maintained that ideas that have sufficient evidence, and are not contrary to the Qur'an and Sunnah, should not be abandoned only because they are the ideas of someone whom we do not trust. If we did so, we would lose a lot of truth.

Ibn Rushd did not find the differences in various theoretical issues among Muslim scholars as problematic. He thought they were natural since, according to Ibn Rushd, consensus was possible only in matters of practical nature. Agreement on theoretical issues, on theology and metaphysics was not feasible at the level of the absolute. This editorial is not intended as an apologia for Ibn Rushd. We do not maintain that he was an impeccable scholar and individual. Neither do we endorse everything that he said or wrote. For instance, his critique of Al-Juwaini may suggest that he was putting limits on the will of God—an idea far from our convictions about the infinite will and the absolutely unlimited power of Allah.

In the Muslim World, Ibn Rushd was not the first in his attempts to reconcile philosophy and religion. Al-Kindi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Bajjah, and Ibn Tufail preceded him in recognizing the complementarity and integration of human knowledge. However, Ibn Rushd provided a profound and deep understanding of issues relevant to the matter. Ibn Rushd's intellectual legacy can be classified into four categories: theology and philosophy, fiqh and *usul*, language and literature, and medicine. Researchers were able to locate 92 books in the first category alone. These books include summaries, commentaries or discussions of some of the works of Plato, Aristotle, Euclides, Nicolus, Forferius, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi, in addition to other important initiatives. Three of these books are well known. They are the "Incoherence of Incoherence" (*Tahafut al-Tahafut*), which is a serious discussion of Al-Ghazali's "Incoherence of Philosophers" (*Tahafut al-Falasifah*), "Decisive Treatise on the Agreement Between Religious Law and Philosophy" (*Fasl al-Maqal*), and "Examination of Methods of Proof Concerning the Doctrines of Religion" (*Manahij al-Adillah*). Moreover, according to many histori-

ans, Ibn Rushd's *Bedayat al-Mujtahid wa-Nihayat al-Muqtasid*, is one of the most important books on Maliki jurisprudence.

In the field of medicine, twenty-two books are known to have been penned by Ibn Rushd. They include summaries and commentaries on Galin, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Tufail. His most famous book on medicine is *Kitab al-Kuliyat*; it was translated into Latin as *Colliget*. On language and literature, three of Ibn Rushd's books are known: a summary of Aristotle's poetry, the essentials of *nahw* (Arabic grammar), and comments on words and derived names.

Ibn Rushd's impact on the West is immeasurable. His books on medicine were taught in Western medical schools until the beginning of the nineteenth century. He was the most important commentator of Aristotle, and European scholars preferred to read him rather than Aristotle for over five hundred years. His reconciliation of religion and reason had extensive influence on the development of catholic theology and Jewish *halakah* (law). Thomas Aquinas, the architect of modern catholic thought, owes everything to Ibn Rushd, as does the Jewish jurist and philosopher Ibn Maimun (Maimonides). Ibn Rushd, known as Averroes in the West, is in many ways the shaper of modern Western theology, philosophy, and science.

From an Islamic perspective, his greatest contribution is his reconciliation of religion and philosophy. In his response to Al-Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, Ibn Rushd's (*Tahafut al-Tahafut*) systematically narrows the gap between the Asharite position and the position of *falsafah* (philosophy). Ibn Rushd demonstrated how Al-Ghazali's critique of the philosophers (Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Aristotle) was based on psychological and semantic misunderstandings. This defense of the Aristotelian position and his approach to religion had a great impact on the early renaissance and on Christian and Jewish theology. Unfortunately, Muslim intellectuals did not benefit from Ibn Rushd's contribution. His works, particularly in theology, were burnt and many of his treatises were extant only in Hebrew or Latin.

Besides the loss of many of his books through burning, an additional reason for the lack of Rushdian influence on Islamic thought is the misunderstanding of his works. Unfortunately, Ibn Rushd has been misinterpreted and distorted in at least four instances. The first time was when his contemporaries, perhaps driven by envy and in trying to defame and delegitimize him, misinterpreted him. This led to a political conspiracy resulting in his exile and the burning of his philosophical and theological works. The burning of his work as well as the virulent attack against him personally deprived the Muslims of his time from benefiting from his work. Interestingly, Al-Ghazali, a near contemporary and the so-called "destroyer of philosophy," was also ill-treated by his contempo-

raries. The point is, that the treatment that Ibn Rushd received in his time is not in any way a measure of the "Islamicness" of his ideas.

Ibn Rushd suffered a second misinterpretation but this time from his Western admirers, the Latin Averoists. They used him to advance what they called the "theory of double truth," arguing that truths arrived at by philosophy and theology are different but equally true! This theory helped them to cope with theological and philosophical tensions in the Christian tradition. Again today, many Orientalists continue to perpetuate this false attribution. Ibn Rushd had argued that truth can be reached through philosophy or through revelation. He defended two paths not two truths.

Finally, Ibn Rushd is misinterpreted by contemporary Arab scholars who try to justify blind imitation of the Western renaissance by alluding to him. Repeated misrepresentation of Ibn Rushd's ideas is an important reason why he has not received his deserved place in Islamic intellectual history.

Most recently, Ibn Rushd's Islamic character was attacked in the Egyptian movie "Al-Maseer" released in 1997, which attempts to deal with the issue of so-called "Islamic terrorism." Rather than advocating enhanced security measures, cultural and political openness, or even education as a solution to the problem, the movie advocates "singing and dancing" as a remedy. In this movie the "religious" person is portrayed either as a hypocritical traitor or a criminal terrorist. The movie invokes Ibn Rushd as a respected historical figure, in the West and in the Muslim world, to provide historical context and intellectual flavor to the script. Unfortunately, he is caricatured as an immoral person without any purpose in life. An image far different from the serious scholar of fiqh and philosophy who was also a magistrate and physician.

Finally, we would like to point out that Ibn Rushd's debate with Al-Ghazali remains a high point in the history of Islamic thought. Reminding us of the sophistication and philosophical depth of Islamic scholarship in what Western scholarship calls the "Middle Ages." After this golden age, his ideas continued to inspire Muslim scholars. For example, Ibn Taymiyyah's *Al-Rad 'ala al-Manatiqah* (Response to the Logicians) was written as a response to Ibn Rushd's *Manahij al-Adillah* (The Methodology of Proofs). Later, in the sixteenth century C.E., the debate got a fresh impetus when Sultan Mahmud al-Fatih requested Khoja Zada (d. 893 A.H.) to write a book to distinguish between the foundations of natural philosophy and *ilahiyat* (theology) in order to reconcile the differences between Al-Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifah* and Ibn Rushd's *Tahafut al-Tahafut*. Khoja Zada's book, *al-Tahafut*, aimed at recognizing issues considered in the domain of the shari'ah and religious doctrine on the one hand and matters of general *hikmah*, (wisdom) which have nothing to do with the shari'ah, on the other.

Recalling the great achievements of the Grand Qaḍi is not enough, we have to revive his spirit of inquiry. His project of reconciling religion and philosophy is not far from *AJISS*'s mission to Islamize the social sciences. We hope that Ibn Rushd's memory will help us to aspire to great heights of intellectual truth and tolerance.

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