

The Philosophy of Interpretation in Ibn Rushd

فلسفة التأويل عند ابن رشد

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore Ibn Rushd's philosophy of interpretation and its significance in understanding the texts of Islamic law. It does so by outlining the foundations of his position from a philosophical perspective and examining their impact on Arab-Islamic thought. The research analyzes a set of ideas he expressed on the issue of interpretation, as presented in several of his works that embody his intellectual project and gained renown both in the East and the West, particularly his well-known book *Decisive Treatise on the Relationship Between Philosophy and Sharia and Their Connection*. This work was written in response to the attacks launched by many jurists of his time against philosophy and philosophers. The study also seeks to highlight the strengths of Ibn Rushd's thought in his advocacy for granting greater freedom to reason in understanding Islamic law, thereby laying the foundations for the unity of philosophical truth and religious truth. He maintained that truth does not contradict truth; rather, it reinforces and testifies to it.

Keywords: Ibn Rushd; interpretation; reason; Sharia; philosophy.

ملخص:

يهدف من هذه الدراسة إلى الولوج إلى فلسفة ابن رشد حول التأويل ومكانته في فهم نصوص الشريعة الإسلامية، وذلك من خلال بيان مقومات موقفه من الناحية الفلسفية أولاً وأثرها على الفكر العربي الإسلامي، وذلك من خلال تحليل جملة من الأفكار التي عبر عنها حول مسألة التأويل، والتي وردت في جملة من المؤلفات التي حملت مشروعه الفكري، والتي ذاع صيتها في العالم شرقاً وغرباً، وخاصة كتابه المعنون " فصل المقال فيما بين الحكمة والشريعة ومن الاتصال"، والذي كتبه في سياق رده على الهجوم الذي شنّه العديد من فقهاء عصره ضد الفلسفة والفلاسفة، ونسعى أيضاً إلى بيان مكانم القوة في فكر ابن رشد في موقفه المرافع من أجل إعطاء مساحة حرية أكبر للعقل في فهم الشرع، مؤسساً بذلك لوحدة الحقيقة الفلسفية والحقيقة الدينية، ذلك أنه يعتقد أن الحق لا يضاد الحق بل يقويه ويشهد له.

كلمات مفتاحية: ابن رشد؛ التأويل؛ العقل؛ الشريعة؛ الفلسفة.

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Various studies on the history of Islamic and Western philosophy affirm that the issue of interpretation has, in all its manifestations, been closely linked to the religious question. In the context of Islamic history, the introduction of reason into the understanding of religious texts began with the emergence of theological sects following the *Great Sediton*

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(*al-Fitna al-Kubra*), when the political crisis transformed into a doctrinal dispute. Similarly, in the history of Western thought, interpretation was also tied to religion: in ancient Greece, Hermes, the messenger of the gods—was entrusted with translating the words of the gods; in Christianity, interpretation was associated with the birth of the Reformation movements and the rise of Renaissance and Enlightenment philosophers, where the rational interpretation of the religious text led to a new understanding of the Gospel's teachings. The same applies to Judaism, albeit under its own specific historical and intellectual circumstances.

Thus, for Muslims, raising the question of interpretation was not an exception in the history of human thought, although in every society it was addressed within its own unique political and historical conditions. In many instances, it represented a dynamic process that revealed the extent of intellectual freedom within the social environment in which it took place. This was particularly evident in Andalusian society during the time of Ibn Rushd (1126–1198 CE), when scientific and intellectual life experienced a remarkable stage of development and openness to philosophical debate, unparalleled in Muslim history, across the fields of jurisprudence, philosophy, and the sciences. Perhaps the most prominent philosophical figure of this period, Ibn Rushd was a jurist deeply versed in the various sciences he pursued, who sought to resolve the crisis surrounding the rational understanding of religious texts, to overcome the perceived duality of truth between religion and philosophy, and to address the conflict between the two that had been stirred by many jurists and scholars of legal theory. In light of all this, we may ask: in what sense did Ibn Rushd address the issue of interpretation in his philosophical project?

Before examining Ibn Rushd's treatment of the issue and situating it within the intellectual context in which he addressed it, we deem it necessary to first present some of the meanings that the term *ta'wīl* (interpretation) carries in the Arabic linguistic tradition. According to the Arab linguist al-Jurjānī, *ta'wīl* is "to divert a word from its apparent meaning to a meaning it can bear, provided that the meaning envisaged is consistent with the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and not just any meaning" (Imārah, 2007, p. 20). For Ibn Rushd, it is "to shift a word from its literal meaning to its figurative meaning without violating the usage of the Arabic language in employing metaphor—whether by naming something after its resemblance, its cause, its consequence, its association, or other such relations that are included in the definition of the various types of figurative speech" (Ibn Rushd, n.d., p. 32).

Muslim scholars and thinkers are almost unanimous in recognizing the importance of *ta'wīl* (interpretation) for understanding religious texts across all schools of thought and intellectual currents, despite their differing attitudes toward limiting or expanding its use. This divergence concerns the extent to which interpretation, as a linguistic practice, is employed to grasp the meanings of religious texts, particularly those related to the realm of the unseen (*al-ghayb*), which the human mind cannot fully comprehend through ordinary, simple language.

Before examining Abū al-Walīd Ibn Rushd's stance on the issue, it should be noted that his writings, along with those of other Muslim philosophers and thinkers, demonstrate

that the discussion on the role of reason and interpretation is neither a modern phenomenon, as some intellectual trends, particularly among certain Orientalists and their Arab followers, tend to suggest, nor a peripheral matter. In the case of Ibn Rushd, we are faced with an intellectual vision rooted in authenticity: a philosophical and jurisprudential position shaped in accordance with the realities of his time and conceived as a direct response to the intellectual and social demands of his era.

Therefore, in order to clarify Ibn Rushd's position on the matter, we find it appropriate at this point to highlight certain features of his methodology that distinguished him from many of the thinkers and jurists of his time. Numerous studies on Ibn Rushd's philosophy describe him as one of the philosophers who assigned a central role to reason in his intellectual project. Ibn Rushd sought to attain truth—whose motives he found deeply rooted within himself—through reason, which he regarded as the thinker's only proper means of achieving a human understanding of reality. Belief in reason, in his view, logically entails accepting the idea of universality, understood as the search for truth in order to determine the principles upon which knowledge of reality should rest. He built his argument on the necessity of cooperation and complementarity in rational inquiry among nations, stating:

“If others have already examined this matter, it is clear that we should benefit, in what we ourselves are investigating, from what those before us have said on it, whether or not they share our religion, provided that it meets the conditions of soundness. By ‘those who do not share our religion,’ I mean those among the ancients before the advent of Islam who have examined such matters” (Ibn Rushd, n.d., p. 26).

From this perspective, Ibn Rushd considered it permissible to adopt the rational arguments developed by Aristotle for the purpose of understanding the Sharī'a. While some jurists regarded this as a blameworthy innovation (*bid'a*) in religion, Ibn Rushd countered by drawing an analogy: just as they deemed syllogistic reasoning impermissible because it was not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah, one might note that *fiqh*-based analogy (*qiyās*) itself emerged in later generations, after the era of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Thus, according to Ibn Rushd, their objection collapses under its own reasoning.

Ibn Rushd's methodology harmonized *dirāya* (critical understanding) with *riwāya* (knowledge transmission), which endowed his works with notable scholarly integrity. He consistently presented the positions and arguments of his interlocutors before articulating his own perspective. This methodological rigor is especially evident in his commentaries on Aristotle, through which he earned the title “The Great Commentator” of Aristotelian philosophy. Under his pen, these commentaries reached an unprecedented level of precision and completeness in the medieval era. However, Ibn Rushd was far from being a mere follower or passive expositor of Aristotle; he engaged in interpretation, reformulation, and original elaboration. His commentaries thus became an integral part of his philosophical system, such that discussing any of his doctrines inevitably requires engaging with the insights and interpretations embedded in his summaries and explanations.

For him, *explanation* means verification and thorough examination by referring to the things themselves and considering them the standard for the truth of the statement being explained, or by referring to demonstrative methods and their types. Explanation, therefore, does not signify absolute subordination; rather, it entails reviewing the Aristotelian text and understanding his doctrine. In the introduction to his summary of Aristotle's *Physics*, he states:

“Our aim in this discourse is to turn to the books of Aristotle and extract from them the scientific statements required by his doctrine—namely, the most reliable ones, and to omit what they contain of the doctrines of other ancients if these are unconvincing and of no benefit in understanding his doctrine. We have only included the transmission of such opinions among those of the ancients when it was evident to all that they were more convincing and more firmly supported by proof. What prompted us to do this is that many people undertake to refute Aristotle's doctrine without having grasped the reality of his position, which leads to obscuring the recognition of the truth, or its opposite, contained therein.” (Rushd, n.d., p. 23)

Ibn Rushd thinks alongside Aristotle and rethinks with him, elucidating the forms of syllogism and the types of proofs upon which he relied, seeking to identify the valid ones. His task, therefore, was to understand the text and internalize it, then to uncover its intellectual structure and epistemic foundations. In doing so, he acquired all the necessary tools to engage in a distinctive reading aimed at offering a new contribution to the field of Arabic-Islamic philosophy.

What distinguishes Ibn Rushd is an intellectual generosity that manifests even in his intellectual battles, particularly in the famous controversy he engaged in with Imām Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1059–1111 CE) through his work *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), a confrontation unparalleled in his era in both intensity and maturity. This accumulated knowledge, which Ibn Rushd had mastered, was further reinforced by his diverse expertise as a philosopher, jurist, and physician, making him the greatest sage of the Middle Ages and, without doubt, the founder of free thought. His critical orientation is clearly evident in his writings, where he examines opinions and scrutinizes them, elucidating their origins and purposes through a logical and analytical approach. From this, he built his philosophical system based on a critical view of earlier philosophical currents, exposing the fallacies into which the Arabic Peripatetic tradition had fallen.

Despite his tendency toward independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) in the various fields in which he engaged, whether in philosophy, jurisprudence, or the judiciary, he was not opposed to tradition. His knowledge, learning, and philosophy were all founded upon intellectual and religious principles that enabled him to construct a solid foundation upon which to build his intellectual edifice. His jurisprudence did not arise in a vacuum, for it was grounded in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, as well as in the juristic efforts of the scholars who preceded him in all Islamic schools of law. In jurisprudence, he adhered to the Mālikī school, and in creed, he followed Ash'arī theology.

When it comes to his writings, most are concerned with methodology, apart from his commentaries on Aristotle. In *Faṣl al-Maqāl fīmā bayna al-Ḥikmah wa-al-Sharī'ah min al-*

Ittiṣāl (*The Decisive Treatise on the Harmony between Philosophy and the Sharia*), he lays out the broad principles that, in his view, should define the relationship between Sharia and philosophy. In *al-Kashf ‘an Manāhij al-Adillah fī ‘Aqā’id al-Millah* (*The Exposition of the Methods of Proof concerning the Doctrines of the Community*), he offers a thoughtful critique of the arguments used by theologians to defend the doctrines of the Sharia. His *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*) is a more elaborate methodological work, where he examines the arguments al-Ghazālī used against the philosophers alongside those put forward by Ibn Sīnā, which he felt fell short of the standard of certainty (Rushd, n.d., p. 24).

Ibn Rushd’s position on the question of *ta’wīl* (interpretation) or, more broadly, on the role of reason in understanding the Sharia, represents an important moment in the history of Arab-Islamic thought, one that merits careful consideration and reflection. This is because it offered a philosophical vision and a stance on the relationship between reason and Sharia, or between philosophy (*ḥikmah*) and Sharia. In *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), he presented arguments and counterarguments through which he refuted al-Ghazālī’s attack, in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), on philosophy and philosophers, as well as his accusations of heresy and unbelief against them. Ibn Rushd’s defense of reason and philosophy stemmed from his own understanding of the role and function of reason, and of the place and role of the Sharia.

Although his responses to al-Ghazālī in *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* were primarily philosophical in nature, in his *Faṣl al-Maqāl fīmā bayna al-Ḥikmah wa-al-Sharī‘ah min al-Ittiṣāl* (*The Decisive Treatise on the Harmony between Philosophy and the Sharia*), he provided what Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī described as a reply on the juridical plane, incorporating into it a legal opinion aimed at refuting and invalidating the views of those who claimed it was impermissible to study philosophical works. Here, Ibn Rushd addressed the issue within the framework of *ijtihād* in Islamic jurisprudence (al-Jābirī, 1998, p. 95). This is precisely what Ibn Rushd declared in the introduction to *Faṣl al-Maqāl* when he stated: “The aim of this treatise is to examine, from the perspective of the Sharia, whether the study of philosophy and the sciences of logic is permissible under the law, prohibited, or commanded—either as a recommendation or as an obligation.” (Rushd, n.d., p. 22) Al-Jābirī regarded this stance as a religious legal opinion intended to dismantle the claims of his opponents who sought to prohibit engagement with philosophy on religious grounds. In contrast, Muḥammad ‘Imārah, in his introduction to his edition of *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, considered this text to be a discourse on methodology, as it raises the issue of the role of philosophy and reason in understanding both the Sharia and existence, in the approach of the general Muslim public and scholars in particular.

Philosophy, then, is an intellectual tool for *ijtihād* within the religious community. Through a juristic analysis and in accordance with the standards of interpretation permitted by the Sharia, Ibn Rushd demonstrated that the law obliges the contemplation of existing things through rational analogy. He states:

“Once it is established that the Sharia has commanded the use of reason to examine existing things and reflect upon them, and since reflection is nothing more than deriving the

unknown from the known and extracting it from it, and this is syllogism, it follows that our contemplation of existing things must be conducted through rational analogy.” (Rushd, n.d., p. 48)

For Ibn Rushd, philosophy was not an abstract luxury but a practical, intellectual tool for *ijtihād* within the religious community. Using juristic reasoning and applying the principles of interpretation permitted by the Sharia, he argued that the law itself requires us to contemplate the realities of existence through rational analogy. In his view, once it is established that the Sharia commands us to use reason to study and reflect upon the world around us, and since such reflection is essentially the process of deriving the unknown from the known, which is the very essence of syllogism, then it naturally follows that our examination of reality should be conducted through rational analogy.

Interestingly, al-Ghazālī had also provided numerous Qur’ānic proofs highlighting the obligation to employ reason in matters of the Sharia and in understanding existence. He quoted several verses calling for reflection and contemplation on the wonders of creation in this vast universe. Echoing this line of thought, Ibn Rushd insisted:

“Once it is established that the Sharia has commanded the contemplation of existing things and reflection upon them, and since reflection is nothing more than deriving the unknown from the known and extracting it from it, and this is syllogism, it follows that our contemplation of existing things must be conducted through rational analogy.” (Rushd, n.d., p. 23)

Historians of Islamic philosophy and the history of al-Andalus paint a fascinating yet paradoxical picture of the time in which Ibn Rushd lived. The region was experiencing a remarkable scientific and intellectual awakening, yet philosophy itself remained under a cloud of suspicion. While almost every other branch of knowledge was welcomed and encouraged, philosophy, and those who pursued it, were met with mistrust and quiet hostility. Those who dared to study it often kept their interest hidden, wary of the public’s reaction. As al-Maqqarī recounts in *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb*, “All sciences had their place among the people, except for philosophy and astrology. These two enjoyed high regard among the elite, but they were never practiced openly for fear of the masses. The moment someone was known to study philosophy or astrology, the common folk would label him a heretic” (‘Uwīḍa, 1993, p. 22).

To illustrate the intensity of the hostility toward philosophy and those engaged in it, we can turn to an excerpt from the decree issued by Caliph Ya‘qūb al-Manṣūr, in which he described philosophers in harsh terms: “...They outwardly conform to the community in appearance, attire, and language, yet inwardly they oppose it with falsehoods. When we discovered in them what is like a mote in the eye of religion and a black stain on the page of certainty, we cast them away for the sake of God as one discards a date pit, and we banished them to where the foolish and misguided are sent. We detested them for the sake of God, just as we love the believers for His sake... so beware, may God guide you, of this faction that endangers faith, as you would beware of poison seeping through the body... Do not incline toward those who do wrong, lest the Fire touch you, for you have no protectors besides God, and then you will not be helped. They are the ones whose deeds have come to

nothing, and they will have nothing in the Hereafter but the Fire, and all that they have done will be in vain. May God cleanse your lands from the filth of the atheists and record in the register of the righteous your unity in defending the truth and standing together, for He is the Generous Bestower” (Antoine, 1904, p. 20).

Reading this decree affirms al-Jābrī’s observation that *Fasl al-Maqāl* served as a religious legal opinion aimed at legitimizing philosophy, since the text of the decree clearly shows that the intellectual conflict of the time had taken on a religious dimension, leading to accusations of deviance, atheism, and heresy against anyone engaged in philosophy or logic, or in any field related to them.

Despite the prevailing intellectual climate of the time, which was marked by a clear hostility toward philosophy among many religious elites and even some caliphs, this did not weaken Ibn Rushd’s determination to pursue knowledge and inquiry. His biography reveals that he was deeply committed to the quest for truth, driven by an inner motive grounded in reason, which he regarded as the only valid and reliable tool for a thinker to attain truth from a human perspective. He believed that faith in reason logically leads to embracing the idea of universality, which is based on the pursuit of truth to establish the principles upon which the understanding of reality should rest.

To illustrate the intensity of the rejection faced by those engaged in philosophy and logic, it is worth noting that the opposing front was quite large. A number of scholars of jurisprudence, legal theory, and theology devoted their efforts to refuting logic. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, in his book *Safeguarding Logic and Theology from the Science of Logic and Theology*, mentions that among the Muslim scholars who disapproved of incorporating logic into the principles of jurisprudence were Ibn al-Salah, Abu Shama, al-Nawawi, and Ibn Taymiyyah.

Following what we have previously mentioned about these opponents, it is important to note that this opposition, starting from the 7th century AH, became associated with the figure of Kamal al-Din Ibn Yunus al-Mawsili, under whom Ibn al-Salah al-Shahrazuri studied. The latter became a fierce adversary of engaging in logic after being asked the following question: Regarding the study and teaching of logic and philosophy, did the Companions, the Followers, the mujtahid imams, and the pious predecessors permit and approve of it? And is it permissible to use logical terminology or not?

His answer was: Logic is the gateway to philosophy, and the gateway to evil is itself evil. Studying or teaching is neither sanctioned by the Lawgiver nor approved by any of the Companions.

As for using logical terminology in matters of Islamic rulings, he considered it among the reprehensible and detested innovations, asserting that Islamic rulings have no need for logic whatsoever. He further added: “*Whoever claims that they engage in logic and philosophy privately for some supposed benefit has been deceived by Satan*” (al-Nashar, 1967, p. 184).

Ibn al-Salah’s fatwa had a profound influence on jurists, to the point where it became a common saying: *Whoever engages in logic becomes a heretic*.

In this regard, scholars of *uṣūl* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) dispensed with Aristotelian logic and developed their own methodology, which may be described as “the jurist’s method of inquiry, or the logic of his issues, in other words, a mental safeguard that protects the jurist’s mind from error in reasoning about legal rulings” (al-Nashar, 1967, p. 71).

Islamic intellectual history sources also mention the theologian al-Nawbakhtī, one of the Shi‘a scholars, who rejected logic, although his rejection differed from that of Ibn Ṣalāḥ. Unlike Ibn Ṣalāḥ, al-Nawbakhtī engaged with the logical discussions of the logicians concerning syllogisms, premises, and definitions. For example, he objected to the logicians’ assertion that a syllogism cannot be built upon a single premise. His objection was based on the idea that in reasoning, it is unnecessary to have two premises, contrary to Aristotle, since a single premise is sufficient.

From al-Nawbakhtī’s stance, we can observe that although the theologians attacked Aristotelian logic and departed from its rules in their research, they nevertheless developed their own logic that differed from Aristotle’s. ‘Alī Sāmī al-Nashar notes that one of the reasons that led the theologians to reject Aristotelian logic was “that the theologians did not accept Aristotle’s metaphysics, which in essence contradicts the metaphysics of the Qur’ān, so it was inevitable that they would not accept the methods of inquiry upon which this metaphysics was based, especially since Aristotle’s logic is connected to and dependent upon the truths of his metaphysics” (al-Nashar, 1967, p. 87).

In *al-Imtā‘ wa al-Mu‘ānasa*, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī recounts an engaging debate between Abū Sa‘īd al-Sarafī and Mattā ibn Yūnus. In this exchange, al-Sarafī set out to challenge the value of logic, while Mattā sought to defend it. When al-Sarafī asked what he meant by “logic,” Mattā explained that it was “a tool of discourse that allows one to distinguish sound speech from flawed speech, and valid meaning from invalid meaning, much like a balance that measures excess and deficiency.”

Al-Sarafī, however, was not persuaded. He countered that “sound speech from flawed speech is recognized by familiar linguistic structures and known rhetorical styles, if we are speaking in Arabic,” adding that “invalid meaning from valid meaning is discerned through reason, if we are reasoning by intellect.” In another part of the debate, he remarked that “logic was devised by a man from the Greeks in the language of his people” (al-Tawḥīdī, 1989, p. 154), questioning why other cultures should adopt it and treat it as a universal standard.

The discussion grew heated, but in the end, Abū Sa‘īd al-Sarafī presented arguments that prevailed over his opponent. These exchanges formed part of a long-standing tradition of critique against Aristotelian logic, laying the groundwork for later, more systematic challenges. Among these, the critique of Ibn Taymiyyah stands out for its methodological depth and maturity. He was not merely a critic, but also a thinker who proposed a coherent alternative, an aspect that will be examined in detail in the second chapter.

In contrast to this current, there emerged a group of philosophers who saw no harm in engaging with the sciences of the Greeks, foremost among them philosophy and logic. The strongest response came from Ibn Rushd, who, after demonstrating the fallacy of the claim

that philosophy and the Sharia are in conflict, affirmed the necessity of rational inquiry into the Sharia for those qualified to undertake it, drawing upon the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. He then moved on to clarify when demonstrative reasoning in religious matters becomes obligatory, stressing that all Muslim scholars agree that the Sharia has both an apparent and an inner meaning, and that they likewise agree that people differ in their intellectual capacities and abilities to comprehend.

From this, it may be said that for him, complete mastery of knowledge is not available to everyone, and that true knowledge, in his view and in that of the philosophers, includes religion as a field of philosophical inquiry, approached through interpretation. Ibn Rushd did not subscribe to the dualism upheld by many who claimed that religion possesses its own truths and science its own distinct truths, or that science has a domain separate from that of faith with its own particular matters. Rather, he held that truth is one, for the aim is the unity of reason, and the guarantor of this unity is the philosopher with his interpretive method. As he stated, "We affirm with certainty that whatever demonstrative proof leads to, if it appears to contradict the outward meaning of the Sharia, that outward meaning is open to interpretation according to the principles of Arabic interpretation, and this is a matter upon which no Muslim harbors doubt and no believer entertains suspicion, for we, as Muslims, know with certainty that demonstrative reasoning does not lead to a conclusion that contradicts what has been conveyed by the Sharia, for truth does not oppose truth, but rather agrees with it and bears witness to it" (Ibn Rushd, n.d., p. 33). In this same context, he insists that such interpretations should be recorded only in works of demonstrative reasoning, for if they are included therein, they will be accessible only to those versed in demonstration, whereas employing poetic, rhetorical, or dialectical methods in such matters would constitute a fault against both the Sharia and philosophy.

As for what may appear to be a contradiction between the outward meaning of the religious texts and the requirements of demonstrative reasoning, he maintains that overcoming such an apparent contradiction, which in reality does not exist, is especially attainable when rational interpretation is applied. In this regard, he asserts, "We affirm with certainty that whatever demonstrative proof leads to, if it appears to contradict the outward meaning of the Sharia, that outward meaning is open to interpretation according to the principles of Arabic interpretation, and this is a matter upon which no Muslim harbors doubt and no believer entertains suspicion, for we, as Muslims, know with certainty that demonstrative reasoning does not lead to a conclusion that contradicts what has been conveyed by the Sharia, for truth does not oppose truth, but rather agrees with it and bears witness to it" (al-Awadi, 1995, p. 24).

Ibn Rushd points out that the Sharia of Islam was revealed for the general public, and it is well known that people vary in their capacities for understanding and belief. Therefore, in order to protect ordinary Muslims, who do not possess the necessary qualifications to comprehend the various sciences based on demonstrative reasoning, and who lack the principles and methods of rational interpretation of religious texts, Ibn Rushd took this matter into account. He held that such interpretations should only be placed in works of

demonstration, for if they were confined to such works, they would be accessible only to those who are qualified in demonstrative reasoning.

He further maintained that if such interpretations were disseminated using poetic, rhetorical, or dialectical methods, this would pose a danger to both the Sharia and philosophy. Ibn Rushd expresses this clearly in *Fasl al-Maqāl*, stating, “The reason why the Sharia contains both an apparent and an inner meaning is the difference in people’s perspectives and the variation in their aptitudes for belief, and the reason for the existence of seemingly contradictory outward meanings is to alert those firmly grounded in knowledge to the unifying interpretation between them” (Averroes, n.d., p. 34).

Ibn Rushd’s way of dealing with cases where the apparent wording of the Sharia seems to conflict with the results of demonstrative reasoning is to give priority to interpretation. For him, interpretation means moving a word from its literal meaning to a figurative one, without departing from the established conventions of the Arabic language in using figurative expressions. This includes, for example, naming something after what it resembles, its cause, its result, or something associated with it, as well as other forms found in the study of figurative speech. After explaining this definition in its usual sense, meaning a sense that differs from the apparent wording, he notes that jurists already rely on interpretation in many legal rulings. If that is the case for them, then it is even more justified for someone trained in demonstrative reasoning to use it, since the jurist works with probable reasoning while the demonstrative scholar works with certain reasoning.

In this context, Ibn Rushd raises the issue of distinguishing between the syllogism of the jurist and that of the demonstrative scholar, asserting decisively that “everything arrived at through demonstration which contradicts the apparent wording of the Sharia is open to interpretation in accordance with the rules of Arabic interpretation. This is a matter about which no Muslim doubts, nor any believer feels uncertain, and what a great increase in certainty it is to remove this misunderstanding, having experienced and intended this purpose of reconciling reason and revelation. Indeed, we say that there is nothing in the Sharia whose apparent meaning contradicts what demonstration leads to, except that, upon examining the Sharia as a whole, one finds in its wording what bears witness to that interpretation or comes close to doing so” (Rushd, n.d., p. 36).

As for those authorized to interpret the sacred texts, Rushd affirms that Islamic law has clearly defined this matter, considering that those entrusted with such a task “are the scholars whom God has distinguished with interpretation” (Rushd, n.d., p. 44). They are the firmly grounded in knowledge whom God Almighty mentioned in the Qur’an, and they are entitled to exercise *ijtihad* to clarify the meanings, purposes, and rulings of the texts. Even if they err, the law pardons them, and they are rewarded for their effort, provided that their *ijtihad* does not deviate from the principles of Sharia or contradict its foundations. Rushd does not stop there but continues in the same context, emphasizing that *ijtihad* in matters of the lawful and the unlawful is not an open door for anyone to enter. Rather, he believes that it requires the fulfillment of a set of conditions by anyone undertaking it, including:

- He must possess a solid understanding of the core principles of Islamic law, for the Sharia cannot exist without them. These include acknowledging the existence of God,

Blessed and Exalted, believing in the prophets, and affirming the realities of eternal happiness in the Hereafter and eternal misery in the Hereafter. Rushd stresses that anyone who deliberately denies any of these essential beliefs has placed themselves outside the fold of Islam.

- He must also have a thorough grasp of how to derive rulings from these foundational principles through analogy. Rushd emphasizes that a qualified jurist should be well-versed in the basic rational principles and understand the proper method of reasoning from them.

This makes it clear that interpretation is a right granted by Islamic law to a select group of scholars who have full mastery of the matter and the necessary qualifications. He believes it should not be left to the general public, because, as he says, “there are things which, due to their subtle nature, can only be known through proof. In His mercy, God has made them accessible to those of His servants who have no way to reach such proof, whether because of their innate nature, their habits, or their lack of learning opportunities” (Rushd, A., n.d., p. 46). For this reason, God included in His law examples of such matters, calling on people to believe in them through common forms of evidence that everyone can understand and grasp, referring here to rhetorical and dialectical arguments. Thus, he stressed that the law has both an outward and an inward dimension.

However, granting scholars deeply grounded in knowledge the permission to interpret the rulings of Islamic law does not, according to the thinker Trad Hammadeh, mean uncovering a truth different from what the religious text itself already contains, whether explicitly or implicitly. The aim, rather, is to bring the religious statement into harmony with what rational proof establishes. The fundamental principle in this process of interpretation lies in the rules governing the modes of expression in the Arabic language, which is the language of the Qur’an. In this sense, interpretation is, in part, a linguistic craft, and this linguistic constraint is essential to prevent interpretation from straying far from the scope of Qur’anic discourse.

Hammadeh does not suffice with the validity of the jurists’ use of interpretation, nor with imposing linguistic restrictions to keep it within its intended bounds; he also presents the legal proof of consensus among Muslims. In this regard, Muslims have unanimously agreed that the words of Islamic law should not all be taken literally, nor should they all be interpreted figuratively. Rather, they differ over which parts should be interpreted and which should be taken at face value. For example, the Ash‘arites interpret the verse on God’s “establishment” and the hadith on His “descent,” while the Hanbalites take them in their apparent meaning. The reason why Islamic law contains both the apparent and the hidden is the difference in people’s innate dispositions and in their capacities for belief (Hammadeh, 2002, p. 140).

The rules Ibn Rushd set for interpretation reflect a mature legal and philosophical vision, one that rises above simple reconciliation or patchwork approaches, and even moves past the idea of a “duality of truth.” This is evident in the fact that most later scholars of Islamic thought have agreed on the legitimacy of interpretation. Muhammad ‘Imarah, for example, writes in his book *The Islamic Text between Ijtihad, Stagnation, and Historicity* that interpretation is one of the key methods and tools a jurist uses to derive legal rulings

across different fields, in a way that remains faithful to the higher objectives of Islamic law. He explains that *ijtihad*, as defined in classical dictionaries, means exerting one's utmost effort and applying all possible reasoning to uncover the intended meaning, so the jurist can arrive at a likely and well-founded legal judgment.

Here, Muhammad 'Imarah, after presenting his detailed position on the meanings of *ijtihad*, interpretation, and text as understood by linguists, jurists, and scholars of *usul al-fiqh*, affirms that the relationship between the text and *ijtihad* is one of constant and inseparable companionship, always and without exception. Broadly and unconditionally, he explains that the Islamic jurist's stance toward the Islamic text, whether the Qur'an or the Sunnah, falls into one of the following positions:

- That the text is of uncertain authenticity, in which case there is no disagreement over the necessity of exercising *ijtihad* to determine its authenticity.

- That the text is of uncertain meaning, in which case there is no disagreement over the necessity of exercising *ijtihad* to establish its intended meaning.

- That the text is of uncertain authenticity and meaning, in which case there is no disagreement over the necessity of exercising *ijtihad* regarding both its authenticity and its meaning.

- When a text is definitive in both its authenticity and its meaning, the situation calls for clarification to dispel the mistaken, and potentially harmful, idea that such a text leaves no room for *ijtihad*. In reality, even a text that is absolutely certain in both respects still requires *ijtihad*. The real task is to determine the kind and scope of *ijtihad* that is suitable for dealing with a text of this level of certainty (Imarah, 2007, p. 29).

He argues that *ijtihad* is indispensable even when dealing with texts that are definitive in both authenticity and meaning, for several reasons. It is needed to compare the text with other texts that address or overlap with the same subject. It is also required to draw out specific details and subsidiary rulings from such a definitive text. In addition, *ijtihad* is essential for developing principles, setting clear frameworks, and codifying rulings based on it. All of this, he stresses, is an undeniable truth on which there is no disagreement.

After outlining the consensus among jurists, scholars of *usul al-fiqh*, and specialists in the various religious sciences of Islam regarding the legitimacy of interpretation, as well as the conditions that must be observed to ensure it remains aligned with the intent and purpose of the Lawgiver in the religious text, we will now turn to presenting Ibn Rushd's approach to this issue and examining the extent to which it corresponds with or diverges from what we have discussed above.

From what has been discussed, several conclusions can be drawn about Ibn Rushd's philosophy of interpretation. He holds that there is no contradiction between the texts of Islamic law, and no contradiction between reason and revelation. Any apparent conflict may only be interpreted by scholars firmly grounded in knowledge, who possess mastery of the religious sciences and the requirements of rational deduction. Consensus, in his view, applies only in matters where agreement has not been reached on what the law conveys in certain verses. He also allows interpretation when there seems to be a conflict between the texts of Islamic law and the principles of reason.

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