

## **A Muslim Philosopher on Reason, Knowledge, and Devotion to God IBN RUSHID, or AVERROES, On the Harmony of Religions and Philosophy (ca. 1190)**

*Ibn Rushid, or Averroes (1126-1198), was a Muslim philosopher, judge, and physician who lived in Cordoba and Seville in what is now Spain. He wrote numerous commentaries on Aristotle, along with works on theology, philosophy, medicine, legal theory, and linguistics. Ibn Rushid argued that studying philosophy was acceptable in Islam and that both reason and revelation are two methods of reaching the truth. Many of his works were translated into Latin and were studied at the new universities that were springing up in Christian Europe.*

The Christian theologian and philosopher Thomas Aquinas also sought to reconcile reason and religion (see Document 14-3), though he criticized Ibn Rushid's idea that all humans share the same intellect.

We maintain that the business of philosophy is nothing other than to look into creation and to ponder over it in order to be guided to the Creator—in other words, to look into the meaning of existence. For the knowledge of creation leads to the cognizance of the Creator through the knowledge of the created. The more perfect becomes the knowledge of creation, the more perfect becomes the knowledge of the Creator. The Law encourages and exhorts us to observe creation. Thus, it is clear that this is to be taken either as a religious injunction or as something approved by the Law. But the Law urges us to observe creation by means of reason and demands the knowledge thereof through reason. This is evident from different verses of the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an says: "Wherefore take example from them, you who have eyes" [Qur'an 49.2]. That is a clear indication of the necessity of using the reasoning faculty, or rather both reason and religion, in the interpretation of things. Again, it says: "Or do they not contemplate the kingdom of heaven and earth and the things which God has created" [Qur'an 7.184]. This is in plain exhortation to encourage the use of observation of creation. And remember that one whom God especially distinguishes in this respect, Abraham, the prophet. For He says: "And this did we show unto Abraham: the kingdom of heaven and earth" [Qur'an 6.75]. Further, He says: "Do they not consider the camels, how they are created; and the heaven, how it is raised" [Qur'an 88.17]. Or, still again: "And (who) meditate on the creation of heaven and earth, saying, O Lord you have not created this in vain" [Qur'an 3.176]. There are many other verses on this subject, too numerous to be enumerated.

Now, it is established that the law makes the observation and consideration of creation by reason obligatory consideration, which is nothing but to make explicit the implicit, which can only be done through reason. Thus, we must look into creation with reason. Moreover, it is obvious that the observation which the Law approves and encourages must be of the most perfect type, performed with the most perfect kind of reasoning. As the Law emphasizes the knowledge of God and His creation by inference, it is incumbent on any who wishes to know God and His whole creation by inference to learn the kinds of inference, their conditions, and that which distinguishes philosophy from dialectic and exhortation from syllogism. This is impossible

unless one possesses knowledge beforehand of the various kinds of reasoning and learns to distinguish between reasoning and what is not reasoning. This cannot be done unless one knows its different parts, that is, the different kinds of premises.

Hence, for a believer in the Law and a follower of it, it is necessary to know these things before he begins to look into creation, for they are like instruments for observation. For, just as a student discovers by the study of the law the necessity of a knowledge of legal reasoning with all its kinds and distinctions, a student will find out by observing the creation of the necessity of metaphysical reasoning...

All that is wanted in an inquiry into philosophical reasoning has already been perfectly examined by the Ancients.<sup>5</sup> 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 is true, we should accept it, and if there is something wrong, we should be warned about it. Thus, when we have finished this kind of research, we shall have acquired instruments by which we can observe the universe and consider its general character. For so long as one does not know its general character, one cannot know the created, and so long as he does not know the created, he cannot know its nature.

All things have been made and created. This is quite clear in itself, in the case of animals and plants, as God has said, "Verily the idols which you invoke, beside God, can never create a single fly, though they may all assemble for that purpose" [Qur'an 22.72]. We see an inorganic substance, and then there is life in it. So we know for certain that there is an inventor and bestower of life, and He is God. Of the heavens, we know by their movements, which never become slackened, that they work for our benefit by divine solicitude and are subordinate to our welfare. Such an appointed and subordinate object is always created for some purpose. The second principle is that for every created thing, there is a creator. So it is right to say from the two foregoing principles that for every existent thing, there is an inventor. There are many arguments, according to the number of the created things, which can be advanced to prove this premise. Thus, it is necessary for one who wants to know God as He ought to be known to acquaint himself with the essence of things so that he may get information about the creation of all things. Those who cannot understand the real substance and purpose of a thing cannot understand the minor meaning of its creation. It is to this that God refers in the following verse: "Or do they not contemplate the heaven and the earth, and the things which God has created?" [Qur'an 7.184]. And so a man who would follow the purpose of philosophy in investigating the existence of things, that is, would try to know the cause which led to its creation, and the purpose of it would know the argument of kindness most perfectly. These two arguments are those adopted by Law...

This method is the right path by which God has invited men to a knowledge of His existence and informed them of it through the intelligence which He has implanted in their nature. The following verse refers to this fixed and innate nature of man," And when the Lord drew forth their posterity from the loins of the sons of Adam, and took them witness against themselves, Am I not your Lord? They answered, Yes, we do bear witness" [Qur'an 7.171].

So it is incumbent for one who intends to obey God and follow the injunction of His Prophet that he should adopt this method, thus making himself one of those learned men who bear witness to the divinity) of God, with His own witness, and that of His angels, as He says, "God has borne witness, that there is no God but He, and the angels, and those who are endowed with wisdom profess the same; who execute righteousness; there is no God but He; the Mighty, the Wise" [Qur'an 3.16].

**Document Questions:**

- 1. How does he view the relationship between reason, knowledge, and religious devotion?**
- 2. How does he view the learning of the ancient world?**
- ~~3. What does Ibn Rushid say is the purpose of philosophy and the study of the world? What does he use as evidence in his argument?~~

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5 Ancients: Ibn Rushid is referring to pre-Muslim philosophers such as Aristotle.

