

# Revisiting Averroes' Influence on Western Philosophy

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Better known as Averroes, Ibn Rushd remains one of the greatest Islamic philosophical geniuses of all times. The unparalleled inventiveness of his mind and the “audacity” of his methods are evident in many of his innovative philosophical activities, which tremendously stirred the minds of his contemporaries in the Middle Ages. Perhaps only a few would deny the far-reaching impacts of his profound philosophical activities and ideas on Western philosophy. Prominent among these are his unique status as a paramount guide to Aristotle, based on his influential and massive commentaries on Aristotle, and his strong arguments for the compatibility of philosophy with religion. These and more, have since established the depth of his ideas and his lasting relevance in Western philosophy history. This paper undertakes an exposition of his philosophical activities, to identify the impacts of his enduring legacies on Western philosophy. The expository and hermeneutical methods of analysis are adopted.

*Keywords:* Averroist, pre-eternity, Almoravid, Aristotelianism, Kitābu'l Kulliyāt fī al-Tibb

## Introduction

Ibn Rushd, commonly referred to in the west as Averroes, was an Islamic philosopher and one of the brightest intellectual luminaries of the Middle Ages. Averroes influenced the course of thoughts both in the east and much more in the west in several domains of knowledge. He remains one of the greatest Islamic philosophers of all times, whose philosophical ideas, especially, as based on his influential commentaries on Aristotle, revived western scholarly interest in ancient Greek philosophers—whose works for the most part had been lost since the fall of the Roman Empire in the sixth century. His philosophical thoughts caused a tremendous stir in the minds of his medieval contemporaries and centuries later. The hallmarks of his thoughts are his convictions that philosophy is capable of demonstrative certainty in many domains; that philosophy should play a central role within religious inquiry, rather than being an alternative to religion; that it is Aristotle who should be our preeminent guide in philosophy; and that all humans share the same intellect, that is, that there is only one single capacity for human knowledge—the material intellect—which is one and the same for all humans (Hasse, 2020). Despite the attendant debates and controversies many of his ideas provoked, their invaluable epistemic currency remains deeply valued and undeniable at all times. This paper provides an expository study of such major elements of his influential philosophical ideas, in order to enunciate the far-reaching influences and the fortunes of his legacies on western philosophy.

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### Biography and Books

Averroes' full name is Abu al-Walid Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd. He is, however, commonly referred to as "Ibn Rushd" in Arabic, or "Averroes" in the Latin west. He was born in Cordova, Spain on 14 April, 1126 at the very edge of the Islamic world (Arnaldez 1986). His father, Abdul-Qasim Ahmad, and his grandfather, Abdul-Walid Muhammad, were both influential chief judges (*Qadi*) of Cordova, at different times, under the Almoravid dynasty (Hillier, 2004). Averroes studied the traditional Islamic *hadith* (traditions of Prophet Muhammad) under with Ibn Bashkuwal (Wohlman, 2009); *fiqh* (jurisprudence) under al-Hafiz Abu Muhammad Ibn Rizq; medicine and philosophy under Abu Jafar Jarim al-Tajail and Ibn Bajjah (also known as Avempace) (Arnaldez, 1986; Wohlman, 2009).

By 1153 Averroes travelled to Marrakesh (Morocco), the capital of the Almohad Caliphate, to perform astronomical observations and to support the Almohad project of building new colleges (Amaldez, 1986). While in Marrakesh, he became friend with the philosopher Ibn Tufayl who was the official physician and counsellor to the Almohad Caliph, Abu Yaqub Yusuf. Ibn Tufayl later introduced Averroes to the Caliph, who was impressed by the young philosopher and took interest in him, employing him initially as chief judge and later as chief physician (Fakhry, 2001). This office led to an important break in his philosophical career; for the Caliph asked him to undertake the very important project of "re-translating and offering commentaries on the works of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle" (Bracy, 2021). This commission marked the beginning of Averroes' massive and historic commentaries on Aristotle. Averroes "devoted much of his scholarly efforts to writing a series of commentaries on Aristotle, producing both brief epitomes and exhaustive, line-by-line studies" (Pasnau, 2011, p. 10). These commentaries would eventually take a life of their own, as they were later translated from Arabic into Hebrew and eventually into Latin, spreading from Muslim to the Jewish and to the Christian worlds.

In 1182 Averroes succeeded his friend, Ibn Tufayl, as court physician to the Caliph and later the same year he was appointed the chief judge (*Qadi*) of Córdoba, a prestigious office that had once been held by his grandfather (Dutton, 1994). In 1184, the Caliph Abu Yaqub Yusuf, died and was succeeded by Abu Yusuf Yaqub. In the beginning, Averroes was patronized and respected by the succeeding Almohad Caliph Yāqūb Yusuf; but when he fell victim to religious Berbers' fanatics who were jealous of his genius, he fell out of the royal favour. Various charges were levelled against him; he was tried and condemned by a tribunal in Córdoba, which ordered the burning of his works. His entire library consisting of invaluable books, except the scientific ones, was reduced to ashes in 1194-1195. He was also exiled to Lucena, a Jewish village outside of Cordova (Arnaldez, 1986). However, in 1198, when the religious fanaticism subsided, Averroes was recalled to the royal court in Marrakesh (Morocco) by the Caliph. The philosopher rejoined the Caliph's court, but he died the same year at the age of 75.

Certainly, among the Islamic philosophers, Averroes made the strongest arguments on behalf of philosophy. However, those arguments would eventually take root, but not where he expected them to. Thus, Averroes is often described as a philosopher who failed to attract the attention of his first audience, resulting in the death of his philosophy at the hands of its intended Islamic readers. This was largely due to the orthodoxy controversies and storms his works generated among the Muslims in Spain, which was largely intolerant to philosophy (Kügelgen, 1994). Hence, as the study of philosophy and science faded in Muslim countries, Averroes' writings and philosophical ideas found new audiences and intellectual appeal in the Latin West,

“through which it influenced the thought of western Europe down to the modern era” (Turner, 1907, p. 15). Sustained later by the *Averroists* (the philosophical movement named after him), Averroes philosophy—Averroism—remained the dominant school of thought in the west, in spite of criticisms and condemnations by the Roman Catholic Church due to orthodoxy controversies some of his ideas raised. It continued to attract followers in the west up to the sixteenth century, when European thought began to diverge from Aristotelianism to humanism and science, due to the rising wave of the Renaissance.

Averroes was a prolific writer whose works covered a greater variety of subjects that extends over medicine, philosophy in all its branches, including logic, natural philosophy, astronomy, metaphysics, psychology, politics, ethics, and jurisprudence, or legal theory (Fakhry, 2001). Principal in his philosophical writings is his attempt to return to Aristotelianism, which he believed had been “distorted by the Neoplatonist tendencies of the earlier Muslim philosophers such as Al-Farabi and Avicenna” (Leaman, 2002, p. 27). His commentaries on Aristotle were his major life works, though he also wrote many of his own books. His commentaries are mostly divided into three kinds: the epitome or short commentary (*jawāmi*), which featured the start of his career; the paraphrase or middle commentary (*talkhīṣ*), composed throughout his career; the literal or long commentary (*sharḥ* or *tafsīr*), dating to his later years. Some of his own major works are: *Decisive Treatise on the Agreement Between Religious Law and Philosophy* (*Faṣl al-Maqāl*); *Examination of the Methods of Proof Concerning the Doctrines of Religion* (*Kashf al-Manāḥij*); *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* (*Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*); and *General Rules of Medicine* (*Kitābu'l Kulliyāt fī al-Tibb*).

### Averroes' Philosophical Ideas

The fundamentals of Averroes' versatile philosophical ideas can be discussed as follows:

#### Compatibility of Philosophy and Religion

Earlier in Muslim Spain, where the society was formulated on strict Islamic lines, philosophy was considered to be an irreligious subject. The discipline had come under attack particularly, from the *Sunni* Islam tradition, and more specifically, from theological schools like the traditionalist, the *Hanbalite*, and the *Ashari* schools (Hillier, 2004). A famous *Ashari* scholar, al-Ghazali, had earlier his work, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-falasifa*), written in opposition to the attempts by earlier Islamic philosophers such as al-Farabi and Avicenna, to incorporate Aristotle's philosophy into Islamic worldview. Al-Ghazali, had charged philosophers with “non-belief in Islam and tried to disprove the teaching of the philosophers using logical arguments” (Leaman, 2002, p. 55). In his *Revivification of the Religion Sciences*, he urged that Muslim believers should set aside not just philosophy and logic, but also the contentious debates and mathematical sciences in order to avoid being “infected with the evil and corruption of the philosophers” (Pasnau, 2011, p. 10).

However, in his *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes provides an apologetic response to al-Ghazali's attack on philosophy. As one, “anxious to establish harmony between religion and philosophy” (Ahmad, 2021, p. 34), he critically examines the tension between philosophy and religion, and challenged the anti-philosophical sentiments within the Islamic *Sunni* tradition sparked by al-Ghazzali. For him, philosophy is permissible in Islam (and in religion as a whole) and even compulsory among certain elites. Again, philosophy cannot contradict revelations in Islam because they are just two different methods of reaching the truth, and “truth cannot contradict truth” (Adamson, 2016, p. 184). He makes a case for three valid “paths” of arriving at

religious truths, and sees philosophy as one, if not the best of them, and for which reason, its study should not be prohibited (Rosenthal, n.d.). He evaluates his approach from his Aristotelian background, identifying Aristotle's three forms of arguments—demonstrative, dialectical, and rhetorical; and from this perspective, “divides humanity into philosophers, theologians and the common masses” (Hillier, 2004, p. 3). Based on this perspective, the *rhetorical* is based on persuasion, and is accessible to the common masses. The *dialectical* is based on debate, and often employed by theologians; and the *demonstrative* is based on logical deduction, and often employed by philosophers (Adamson, 2016). According to Averroes, the Quran uses the rhetorical method of inviting people to the truth, which allows it to reach the common masses with its persuasiveness, whereas philosophy uses the demonstrative methods that are only available to the learned and provides the best possible understanding and knowledge (Adamson, 2016).

For him, only the philosopher, employing certain logically demonstrative proofs is capable and competent (as well as obliged) to interpret the doctrines contained in the scripture (i.e. Qur'an), and not the Muslim *mutakallimūn* (dialectic theologians), who rely on dialectical arguments. In his view, without engaging religion critically and philosophically, deeper meanings of the tradition can be lost, and this may ultimately lead to deviant and incorrect understandings of the divine. According to him, when conclusions reached by philosophy appear to contradict the text of the revelation, revelation must be subjected to interpretation or *allegorical* understanding to remove the contradiction (qtd. in Guessoum xx). This interpretation must be done by those “rooted in knowledge” (a phrase taken from the Quran, 3:7), which for Averroes refers to philosophers who have “access to the highest methods of knowledge” (Adamson, 2016). He also argues that the Quran calls for Muslims to study philosophy because the study and reflection of nature would increase a person's knowledge of “the Artisan” (God) (qtd. in Guessoum xxii).

### Metaphysics Ideas

For Averroes, of the various kinds of beings, substances are what exist in the most proper sense (*Long Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 4.138 {125}). Among substances, the most familiar are concrete individuals like dogs and stones. But these are composite entities, and since the principles of a substance are themselves even more properly considered to be substances (*Long Commentary on the Anima... II.8*), the most fundamental substances in the sensible realm are the metaphysical ingredients of composite substances, namely, matter and form (*Long Meta VII.44* {960}). Averroes explains that, underlying all changes, and enduring through it, is homogeneous matter, defined simply by its potentiality—that is, its potential to serve as subject for any earthly form. Conceived without form, it is perpetually enduring and numerically one everywhere. Accordingly, all transient bodies share this body that is numerically one, because it is “deprived of the divisions of individual forms” (*Long Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, XII.14). This is the concept of the “prime matter”, which for Averroes, lies “halfway, as it were, between absolute non-being and actual being” (XII.14). Matter exists only when actualized by form, but the first form it receives is not the nature of the composite substance (dog, stone, etc.) but instead the “indeterminate dimensions” (absolute non-being) that give matter its corporeal character (actual being). Thus, he postulates a persisting extended substratum (prime matter) beneath all physical changes. But his conception of matter, far from making further forms unnecessary, explains how multiple forms can be instantiated in the same material stuff: “the presence of dimension in prime matter is a prerequisite for the existence of contraries” (*Compendium of Metaphysics*, 3.126). Since forms, by their nature, are always individuals, Averroes insists that universals do not exist outside the soul/mind (*Compendium of*

*Metaphysics*, 2.73-5)—the theory does not require a “principle of individuation” for form. In other words, it is matter, which by nature, is extended that serves as the principle of individuation.

The other internal principle of composite substances is *form*. According to Averroes, form, equally counts as a substance, and indeed is substance in the most proper sense of the term. For him, substantial forms can be distinguished from accidents in that, a subject (a dog, a stone) endures through the gain and loss of its accidents, whereas when the substantial form of the subject departs, the subject ceases to exist. Thus, “form is the primary substance only because it is the cause of the determinate substance and the determinate substances come to be substance only by it” (*Long Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, VII.34). Simply put, for Averroes, the essence or quiddity of a thing is accounted for entirely by its form. Like Aristotle, Averroes argues that, in the cosmological sphere one finds things that are both moving and moved at once and things that are only moved. Hence, there must be something that imparts motion but is never moved; this is the Prime Mover (i.e., God). According to him, causes that are essentially ordered are simultaneous, such that the prior stages are a condition for the effect's ongoing existence, as when waves move a ship, the wind moves the waves, and the wind is moved by elemental forces (Incoherence I.1 {59}).

In such a series there must be a First Cause, because an endless such series would be actually infinite all at once, which Averroes regards as impossible (Incoherence I.4 {275}). This First Cause cannot itself be something in motion, otherwise, some still prior mover would be required to move the supposedly First Mover, and this would lead to an essentially ordered infinity of movers (EpiMeta 4.139). Physics, thus, provides the proof for the existence of a Prime Mover, and metaphysics is concerned with the action of this Mover. The Prime Mover is the Ultimate Agent for Averroes and it must be Eternal and Pure Actuality. It did not merely push the universe into existence and remain idle thereafter—for the universe would slip into chaos. But how is the unmoved Prime Mover the principle of motion and causation in the cosmos without being moved itself? Here, Averroes contends that the Prime Mover moves the cosmos, particularly the celestial bodies, by being their object of desire. Averroes recognizes a problem within his view here.

### **On the Existence and Attributes of God**

Averroes lays out his views on the existence and attributes of God in the treatise, *The Exposition of the Methods of Proof Concerning the Beliefs of the Community*. Here, he dismisses the arguments for the existence of God given as by the different Islamic sects as well as the *a priori* metaphysical arguments of Ibn Sīnā, as inadequate and falling short of being demonstrative (*The Exposition of the Methods of Proof*... 1). For Averroes, God's existence can be demonstrated through a complex argument from the Aristotelian physics, starting from empirical features of the world that are better known to us. God serves not as an Efficient Cause, but only as a Final and Formal Cause (Hillier, 2004). Hence, for him, the two arguments that are logically sound and which cohere with the Quran are: the arguments from “providence” and “from invention” (Hillier, 2004). The *providence* argument considers that the world and the universe seem finely purposed to support human life. Averroes cited the sun, the moon, the rivers, the seas, and the location of humans on the earth. According to him, this suggests a Creator (Final Cause) who created them for the welfare of mankind (Fakhry, 2001). The argument from *invention* contends that worldly entities such as animals and plants appear to have been “invented”; therefore, a Designer (Formal Cause) was behind the creation and that is God (*The Exposition of the Methods of Proof*... 2). Averroes' two arguments here, are, *teleological* in nature and not *cosmological* like the arguments of most Muslim kalam theologians of his day.

From establishing the existence of God, Averroes turns to explaining the nature and attributes of God. According to him, God alone, among intellectual beings, has no further object of intellectual contemplation that might serve as his final cause. On the contrary, like Aristotle, he maintains that God is a self-thinking being: “the First Form thinks of nothing outside itself” (*Incoherence*, I.11 {435}). This accounts for God’s unique *simplicity* as a *puremind*, always fully actualized by nothing other than Himself. However, this leads to questions about the sense in which God can be said to have knowledge of the created world. For Averroes, God has knowledge of the created world in his own manner, neither in universal nor particular, not as if his thoughts are caused by the world, but rather as the Cause of the world (*Incoherence*, I.3 {226-7}, I.13 {462}). That is, the divine mind’s “thinking its own self is identical with its thinking all existence” (*Incoherence*, I.11 {435}).

Again, for Averroes, terms are to apply to God and creatures in a non-univocal way (*Long Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, XII.39 {1620-4}). That is, terms, for example, love, are not to be predicated of God as they are predicated of humans; for God’s attributes, though have some similarities with, yet, are different from man’s. This arises, for instance, not just in the case of knowledge but also in the case of *will*. For, since God “is exempt from passivity and change,” He does not exercise *will* in the usual sense of the term (*Incoherence*, I.3 {148}). Still, in another sense God is “an intending and willing agent” in virtue of the special causal relationship that God has to the world. Similarly, Averroes affirms, in a special sense, that God is the Creator of the world, and that God exercises providence over all existent beings, though he denies that any individual enjoys a special divine providence (*Long Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, XII.37 {1607}).

### **On the Pre-eternity of the Universe**

Centuries earlier, before Averroes, there had been debates among Muslim thinkers, bordering on whether the world was created at a specific moment in time or whether it had always existed. The Neo-Platonic Islamic philosophers, Al-Farabi and Avicenna had argued earlier the world had always existed from eternity (Fakhry, 2001). This view was criticized by Muslim theologians and philosophers of the Ashari kalam tradition. Again, al-Ghazali, wrote an extensive refutation of the pre-eternity doctrine, and accused the Neo-Platonic philosophers of unbelief (*kufr*) (Fakhry, 2001) in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Averroes responds to al-Ghazali’s argument and charges in his *Incoherence of the Incoherence (Tahafut al-Tahafut)*, maintaining that the world had always existed, eternally; and that the differences between the two positions were not vast enough to warrant the charge of unbelief (Fakhry, 2001). Citing some verses that mention pre-existing things like, “throne” and “water” in passages related to creation in the Quran, Averroes argues that the pre-eternity doctrine of the world does not necessarily contradict (Hillier, 2004). For him, a careful reading of the Quran implies that only the “form” of the universe was created in time but that its existence had been eternal (Fakhry, 2001). Accordingly, God works differently from the man; for as humans, we can wilfully decide to perform some action and then wait a period of time before completing it. But for God, there can be no gap between decision and action; for nothing differentiates one time from another in God’s mind; and there can be no physical limits that can restrict God from acting.

Averroes accuses al-Ghazzali of conflating the eternal and human will in a univocal manner. He rather explains that, for humans, the will is the faculty to choose between two options, and it is desire that compels the will to choose. But this understanding of will cannot be predicated of God in the same way as it is for man. God cannot have desire because that would entail a *change* within the Eternal, when the object of desire was

fulfilled. Furthermore, the creation of the world is not simply the choice between two equal alternatives, but a choice of existence or non-existence. Finally, if all the conditions for action were fulfilled, there would not be any reason for God not to act. God, therefore, being Omniscient and Omnipotent would have known from the eternal past what he had planned to create, and without limit to his power, there would be no condition to stop the creation from occurring. Averroes rests his case here on more fundamentally on the nature of God as the First Cause. According to him, since God is Himself Unmoved, that is, wholly changeless as the First Cause, then His causal agency—the world—must likewise be eternal; for, “it is incoherent to posit an eternally existing, changeless Actuality (God), which suddenly springs into agency after having not acted for an eternity... the effect of a cause cannot be delayed after the causation” (*Incoherence*, I.1 {15}).

### Logic and Methodology

Fouad Ahmed (2021) explains that, “the general character of Averroes philosophy is illuminated by his overarching picture of logic” (p. 2). Averroes sees logic as the study of the conditions and rules that rightly guides the mind toward the conception of essences and the assent to propositions. His vision of an educated person is one “who has been instructed in the art of logic” (Black, 1990, p. 90). He also promoted logic “as the key to a true understanding of religion” (Pasnau, 2011, p. 12). He divides logical processes into five types of argument: demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, poetical, and fallacious. These arguments are not distinguished by their forms, which are the same, but by their matter, that is, by their premises. According to him, the premises of demonstrative arguments are necessary; the premises of dialectical arguments are generally accepted; the premises of rhetoric are generally received; the premises of poetic arguments are imaginative, and the premises of fallacious arguments are deceiving (*Long Commentary on Posterior Analytic*, I.7).

Averroes sees *demonstration* as the center of logic and its very purpose; for it is the only procedure that leads to certainty in philosophy and “the most perfect kind of reflection (*naẓar*), using the most perfect kind of inference (*qiyās*)” (*Decisive Treatise*... 3). However, this does not mean that non-demonstrative arguments are useless. Generally, where one kind of argument is not effective, other kinds of arguments should be used. Dialectic offers a path toward demonstration and to science, which, although it does not obtain certainty, is close to it. Rhetoric contributes, through its paradigms and enthymemes, to reinforcing and promoting demonstrative evidence. The study of fallacious reasoning is useful in assessing the faulty argumentative methods of the theologians (the *mutakallimūn*, that is, practitioners of *kalām*). In light of the high status of demonstration, Averroes considers it with great care in his commentaries. The purpose of examining demonstrative arguments is to understand the absolute demonstration that gives complete certainty and constitutes a science (*Long Commentary on Posterior Analytic*, I.7).

### Political Philosophy

Averroes' political philosophy is laid out in his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*. He argues that, a Pious Caliphate is the model republic, where the dreams of Plato can be realized: where the Muslim Imam, Caliph and lawgiver of the state, is the philosopher-king with the following attributes: Love of knowledge, good memory, love of learning, love of truth, dislike for sensual pleasures, dislike for amassing wealth, magnanimity, courage, steadfastness, eloquence, and the ability to “light quickly on the middle term” (*Commentary on Plato's Republic*, I.21). He recommends the study of logic rather than mathematics in the training of the rulers and guards of the model republic and virtuous city. According to him, a ruler should have both wisdom and courage, which are needed for governance and defence of the state (Fakhry, 2001).

Averroes believes that *persuasion* and *coercion* are the two methods of teaching virtue to citizens in the state (*Commentary on Plato's Republic Republic*, II.64). Persuasion is the more natural method consisting of rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative methods; sometimes, however, coercion is necessary for those not amenable to persuasion, e.g., enemies of the state. Thus, he justifies war as a last resort, and supports this using some Quranic verses (Fakhry, 2001). He advocates for women's participation in politics, including participating as soldiers, philosophers, and rulers (Fakhry, 2001). For him, women are equal to men in all respects and possess equal capacities to shine in war and peace. He regrets that the Muslim societies of his time limited the public role of women, a practice which he considers as harmful to the state's well-being (*Commentary on Plato's Republic Republic*, I.54).

### **Ethical Views**

In line with the Aristotelian view, Averroes takes the goal of human life happiness (Hourani, 1962). He explains that for ordinary people, the ultimate guide to happiness is the Quran, which exhibits miraculous wisdom in the rules it sets out to promote human flourishing. But the ultimate human happiness, for those who are capable of it, is to become perfect in the theoretical sciences. Such perfection arrives when human beings *conjoin* themselves to the separate Agent Intellect (universal intellect associated with all human knowledge, which gives form to matter and facilitates human knowledge), which is to say that they pass from a partial conception of intelligible objects to a conception of the Agent Intellect itself. At this point a human being in some sense takes on an "eternal existence" (*Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*...5.41), and is "made like unto God" (*Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, III.36 {501}), and even "becomes one of the eternal, incorporeal beings" (*Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*...5.40). Averroes sees this notion of *conjunction* (*ittiṣāl*) between man and the Agent Intellect, as the goal of human life and human perfection that would be achieved through study, contemplation, philosophical speculation, negation of desires especially those relating to the senses, and with the assistance of prayer and the Quran (*Epistle on the Possibility of Conjunction*..., 15.103-104).

Regarding freewill and determinism, Averroes maintains that man is "neither the absolute master of his destiny nor bound by fixed immutable decrees, but that the truth lies in the middle" (Ahmad, 2021). Human actions, he says, depend partly on free-will and partly on external causes. These external causes spring from general laws of nature; and God alone knows their sequence. According to him, man should make utmost efforts to attain perfection which implies complete identification with the active universal intellect (Ahmad, 2021).

### **Psychological and Epistemological Views**

Averroes' views on psychology are expressed in his three commentaries on Aristotle's *De Anima*. In line with the Aristotelian tradition, Averroes postulates a special sort of substantial form—a soul—to account for living substances. For him, even in the mundane case of plants, the complexities of their operations require a special principle beyond what would be adequate for nonliving things: nutrition, for instance, "is ascribed to the soul because it is impossible for it to be ascribed to the powers of the elements" (*Long Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, II.14). He divided the soul into five faculties: the nutritive, the sensitive, the imaginative, the appetitive, and the rational. The primary psychological faculty of all plants and animals is the nutritive or vegetative faculty, passed on through sexual generation. The remaining four higher faculties are dependent on



the nutritive faculty and are really perfections of this faculty—the product of a nature urging to move higher and higher. The nutritive faculty uses natural heat to convert nutrients from potentiality to actuality, which are essential for basic survival, growth, and reproduction of the living organism. This faculty is an active power which is moved by the heavenly body (Active Intellect). Meanwhile, the sensitive faculty is a passive power and is related to sensible forms and dependent upon the animal's physical senses (e.g. touch or vision). The imaginative faculty is dependent on the sensitive faculty. It differs from the sensitive faculty, however, by the fact that it can unite individual images of objects perceived separately. The imaginative faculty stimulates the appetitive faculty, which is understood as desire, since it imagines desirable objects.

The rational faculty is unlike the imaginative faculty, in that it apprehends motion in a universal way and separate from matter. It has two divisions, the practical and theoretical, given to humans alone for their ultimate moral and intellectual perfection. The rational faculty is the power that allows humanity to create, understand, and be ethical. In its effort to achieve perfection, the rational faculty moves from potentiality to actuality. In doing so it goes through a number of stages, known as the process of *intellection*. Averroes distinguished between degree of happiness and assigns every believer the happiness that corresponds to his intellectual capacity. For Averroes, the human soul is a separate substance ontologically identical with the Active Intellect; and when this Active Intellect is embodied in an individual human it is the material intellect. The material intellect is analogous to prime matter, in that it is pure potentiality able to receive universal forms. As such, the human mind is a composite of the material intellect and the passive intellect, which is the third element of the intellect. The passive intellect is identified with the imagination, which, as noted above, is the sense-connected finite and passive faculty that receives particular sensual forms. When the material intellect is actualized by information received, it is described as the speculative (habitual) intellect. As the speculative intellect moves towards perfection, having the Active Intellect as an object of thought, it becomes the acquired intellect. In that, it is aided by the Active Intellect, perceived in the way Aristotle had taught, to acquire intelligible thoughts. This way, the soul's perfection occurs through having the Active Intellect as a greater object of thought.

Averroes' best known philosophical doctrine holds that there is only one intellect for all human beings. The doctrine is sometimes labelled "monopsychism", but this is a problematic term, since Averroes' unicity thesis concerns the intellect, not the soul. Averroes' theory has an epistemological and an ontological purpose. On the one hand, Averroes wants to explain how universal intelligibles can be known, on the other hand, he wants to account for Aristotle's claim that the intellect is pure potentiality and unmixed with the body (*Long Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, III.5). The material intellect is the basis of Averroes theory of "the unity of the intellect", according to which the material intellect, like the agent intellect, is a single, separate, eternal substance; and that there is only one material intellect, which is the same for all humans and is unmixed with human body (*Long Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, III.5). The intellect is eternal continuously thinking about all that can be thought, using faculties (e.g., the brain) of individual humans as the basis for its thinking process. Averroes recognizes the audacity of supposing that human beings share in a single intellect, writing that "this claim came to me after long reflection and intense care, and I have not seen it in anyone else before me" (III.5). Averroes uses the concept of *fīkr* (or *cogitatio* in Latin) to explain the process that happens in the individual human brain, a process that contains not universal knowledge but "active consideration of particular things" the person has encountered (Adamson, 2016). The use of human faculty explains why even though we

all share the material intellect, thinking can be an individual experience or simply count as *my* thinking. Each of us, therefore, partially controls the operation of this separate material intellect. *Its* operation is to think, but inasmuch as we each control our imagination, and the imagination is what triggers thought, it is appropriate to think of the thoughts we trigger as *our* thoughts, and to think of the two shared intellects, agent and material, as each a part of our soul (*Long Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, II.60{500}). However, for Averroes, universal knowledge is, nevertheless possible because there is the universal capacity for knowledge through the material intellect. This theory, however, attracted controversy when Averroes' works entered Christian Europe. In 1229 Thomas Aquinas made a detailed critique on it in his work, titled, *On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists* (Hasse, 2020).

### **Views on Medicine**

Writings in medicine occupy an important place in Averroes' career. He authored of about twenty medical treatises including his encyclopaedic work "Kitābu'l Kulliyāt fī al-Tibb" (General Rules of Medicine), better known as "Colliget" in Latin. While his works in medicine indicate an in-depth theoretical knowledge in medicine of his time, he likely had limited expertise as a practitioner as he declares that, "it is this part of medicine that I believe restrains me from being perfect in this art. And that I haven't had much practice" (*Kulliyyāt*, VII. 517).

Averroes sees medicine as "an art whose action is preserving health and curing disease, based on science and experience" (*Kulliyyāt*, prol.131). However, for the most part, Averroes' medical work follows the medical doctrine of Galen, an influential Greek physician and author from the 2nd century, which was based on the four humors—blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm, whose balance is necessary for the health of the human body—though at times, he was critical of Galen. Part of Averroes major contributions in his medical work include his observations on the retina. According to Belen and Bolay (2009), "he might have been the first to recognize that retina was the part of the eye responsible for sensing light, rather than the lens as was commonly thought" (p. 378). Another of his contributions is his departure from Galen and the medical theories of the time in his description of stroke as produced by the brain and caused by an obstruction of the arteries from the heart to the brain (Belen et al., 2009). He was also the first to describe the signs and symptoms of Parkinson's disease in his *Kulliyat*, although he did not give the disease a name.

### **Legacies on Western Philosophy**

Averroes looms particularly large over the history of western philosophy from the 13th century, all the way through the Renaissance (Akasoy & Giglioni, 2010). This influence endures to our contemporary time. His enormous impacts and influences on western European philosophy arise essentially from his unique role as the teacher and paramount guide to Aristotle—who taught the west the mind of Aristotle through his massive commentaries. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD, western Europe fell into a cultural decline that resulted in the loss of nearly all of the intellectual legacy of the Classical Greek scholars, including Aristotle (Farkhry, 2001). During this time, Averroes' commentaries, which were translated into Latin and entered western Europe in the thirteenth century, provided an expert account of Aristotle's works and made them available again for the western European philosophers (Adamson, 2016). These commentaries, particularly re-awakened western European interest in Aristotle and Greek thinkers, an area of study that had been widely abandoned after the fall of the Roman Empire. Famous scholastics in the west as Thomas Aquinas

believed him to be so important that they did not refer to him by name, but simply called, "The Commentator" (Crabb, 2021).

His writings notably, attracted a strong circle of followers in the west, led by such prominent thirteenth-century as Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia, who propagated his philosophical views under the name, the *Averroists*. His works were extensively studied and many commentaries written on several of them by many western scholars as the general run of scholars and students relied on Averroes as the supreme guide to Aristotle (Ben Ahmed, 2021). Although many of his ideas were deemed contentious, especially since they were perceived as being incompatible with the core teachings of Christianity, yet, many lead Medieval Christian thinkers to rely extensively on Averroes' works. Thus, even while Thomas Aquinas and other Medieval Christian philosopher as Albert the Great and John Don Scotus disagreed with Averroes on various high-profile questions, they gladly profited from and were greatly influenced by Averroes' commentaries on numerous other matters. Aquinas, for instance, used Averroes' commentaries as his model, and heavily relied on Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle for most of his ideas on metaphysics, ethics, and natural philosophy (Turner, 1907). He referred to Averroes as "one who had, indeed, perverted the Peripatetic tradition, but whose words, nevertheless, should be treated with respect and consideration" (Turner, 1907, p. 17).

Also, inspired by Averroes' theory of *Intellection*, Boethius of Dacia maintained that human happiness can be reached in this life, which is a happiness proportioned to human capacities, whereas the highest kind of happiness as such is reserved to the afterlife. His conviction that the philosopher's life is the only true life echoes the very self-confident and elitist stance taken by the Averroes (Hasse, 2021).

Again, with his views on the compatibility of religion and philosophy, Averroes further laid the enduring foundation in western philosophy for the acknowledgement of the complementarity between faith and reason, as well as the rigorous philosophical analysis of religion, and logical demonstration of religious truths. It is for this reason that he is sometime credited with the titles of the "father of free thought" (Guillaume, 1945) and the "father of rationalism" (Gill, 2009). His audacious philosophy, which encouraged classical learning and views, "set stage for the intellectual movement known as the Renaissance that came several centuries later" (Bracy, 2021, p. 18).

Furthermore, among early Jewish scholars who were influenced by received Averroes' works was, Moses Maimonides, the visionary Jewish philosopher and prolific author (Sarah, 2016). Maimonides, opened the way to a sort of adoption of Averroes as an unofficial, "Judaizing" interpreter of Aristotle among the Medieval Jewish thinkers. He set this tone in his letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon: "Take care not to read Aristotle's books without the commentaries on them... by Averroes" (Marx, 1935, p. 378). His views on active intellect, conjunction between human intellect and separate active intellect, and epistemology were largely influenced by Averroes. Other Jewish writers and thinkers, including Samuel ibn Tibbon, Judah ibn Solomon Cohen, and Shem-Tov ibn Falaquera, relied heavily on Averroes' texts for their works. A key role in transmitting to Jewish philosophers a direct knowledge of Averroes' philosophy was obviously played by the Arabic-into-Hebrew translations of his works, including Averroes' various commentaries on Aristotle's texts.

## Conclusion

Evidently, Averroes remains one of the most important and versatile philosophical geniuses in world history, whose encyclopedic thoughts were quite influential western Medieval world and have endured till date in many ways. By every standard, this great Islamic philosopher and most learned exponent of Aristotelian

philosophy in the world, occupies a unique place in the annals of western philosophy history. The enduring influence of his philosophical views in western philosophy is evident in many on-going philosophical themes and debates in metaphysics, ethics, philosophy of religion, politics, and epistemology. His impacts and enduring influence on western philosophy have thus made the knowledge of his philosophy a wholesome imperative protocol for an objective appreciation of the roots of western philosophy.

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