



**AVERROES (IBN RUSHD, 1126-1198) AND AVERROISM ON
SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: MAKING A CASE FOR A
RESPONSIBLE SCIENCE**

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In studies of the work as a whole, those scholars aspiring to present Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) as a philosopher like the others most often simply end up describing a slightly modified Aristotelian system. In such works, the 'philosophy of Averroes' is presented as no more than a blend containing a large portion of Aristotle and a meagre helping of Ibn Rushd. This also prompted Renan to comment that there was no originality in this thought¹. By way of reaction to this, emphasis has been placed on those points where Ibn Rushd affirmed his independence. However, these are often points of detail difficult to co-ordinate by themselves. In the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, R. Arnaldez chose to present only those works known in Arabic, so as to avoid the errors introduced by the translations. Nevertheless, this still does not eliminate the diversity of semantic and intellectual levels in Ibn Rushd's works. Our survey presents what is primarily an interpretation of Ibn Rushd's *approach*. I am aware that while this may help us understand what he wrote in the context of his own time, it makes it harder to grasp the use to which it might have been put under different circumstances. Ibn Rushd's Latin and Jewish readers were not concerned with him as a person nor even as a thinker. What they wanted from him was instruction, and *solutions*. Thus it is not possible to evade the essential points which have produced the term 'Averroism', whilst the other commentators have not given their name to a school. In the middle ages the following five statements were considered characteristic of this philosophy: (1) The world is eternal; (2) God does not know particulars and there is no Providence; (3) There is no free will; (4) The possible intellect is one numerically, as is the active intellect; hence there is no individual immortality nor individual moral responsibility; (5) Philosophy and theology are contradictory to one another and the supernatural must be rejected. The fifth point - the 'theory of the double

¹ Dominique Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd (Averroes)*, Translated by Olivia Stewart, London and New York, 1991, pp. 97 sq.

truth' - is simply a distortion from outside of Ibn Rushd's hierarchical conception. Its second aspect, like points (1), (2) and (3), is no more than an extrapolation drawn from the commentaries alone and presented not just as an explanation given on a specific point of Aristotle's work, but as Ibn Rushd's thought itself. Ibn Rushd gives very specific and entirely explicit solutions to points (1) and (2). As we have also seen, he gives a somewhat modified response on point (3) but clearly opposes Ibn Tūmārt's idea of predestination. On the other hand it is more difficult to pronounce on the fourth point, described by Saint Thomas Aquinas as 'the most shameful error' amongst the theses attributed to Ibn Rushd. Readers of 'Averroes' have indeed found in the works translated under this name elements which permit the formulation of this 'technical solution' - which is no longer a simple general position like the theory of the double truth but a response to specific problems which are also not specifically Aristotelian. What is it, then, that leads Ibn Rushd to consider this question, and does his overall approach shed light on the solution he gives - a solution on which, moreover, the specialists are far from being agreed?

J. Berque² has drawn attention to the fact that while aligning himself with pre-socratic Hellenism, Ibn Rushd was clearly marked by one of the most characteristic features of Arab culture - namely a sense of ambivalence. This is represented in particular by the linguistic form of *addad* (singular: *didd*) or opposites, which comprise a class of no less than four hundred and twenty six words that can signify opposites (censure - praise; strength - weakness; etc.). Not only does Berque show this feeling of ambivalence in Ibn Rushd's *Fiqh*, in his religious thought and in the philosophical refutation of Ghazali, but he also points out a highly relevant passage in the *Fasl al-maqal* in which Ibn Rushd refers explicitly to the phenomenon of *addad* in order to expose the confusions that can arise from homonyms. If a single word can indicate different or even opposing things, the only criterion is time. A *didd* only indicates opposites in the dictionary, in reality it indicates one thing at one particular time and another thing at another. The whole of Ibn Rushd's thought consists in shifting from one moment to another. The juridical approach of *ikhtilaf* consists in confronting the practitioner with sometimes equal possibilities between which he must then choose by intuition (*dhawq* -

² J. Berque, *Averroes et les contraires. L'ambivalence dans la culture arabe*, ed. J. Berque et J.P. Charnay, Paris, 1967.

literally 'taste'). However, in theoretical knowledge there are no equivalents, there is what Berque correctly calls 'a gradated theory of truth'³.

A. General overview

1. Introduction

I thank the promotor proximus for his friendly and uplifting laudation and the Rector, the chairman of the Sarton committee, all members and colleagues from the respective faculties for having chosen me to be the laureate for this academic year of their prestigious chair.

Ladies and gentleman, dear students,

I shall, in this setting and to the best of my abilities, as far as this is possible in such circumstances, focus on certain aspects of the work of Ibn Rushd, the Cordoban philosopher of the 12th century, better known by his Latin name, Averroes. Why Averroes? For a number of reasons. Not only have eminent colleagues such as Fernand Vandamme, Herman De Ley and Ronald Commers, been occupied with him directly or indirectly - he is after all the philosopher who, thanks to strongly controversial work by Renan, during the second half of the 19th century, started and stimulated the Arab Renaissance - but Sarton himself has made major contributions during the thirties to the critical discussion, examination, clarification and publication of works by this Arab representative of Enlightenment.

The Arab Renaissance or Islamic revival brings us to another problem. The fourteen hundred-year-old conflict between Islam and the Western World has augmented at the end of the 20th Century. Along with Samuel Huntington, I remark five factors that are involved:

Firstly, the Islamic growth in population has resulted in great numbers of unemployed and dissatisfied youngsters, who become recruits for the Islamic cause.

Secondly, the Islamic Revival has given Muslims new faith in the distinction of the character and dignity of their civilisation. We want to cater to this with Averroes.

³ Ibidem, p.139

Thirdly, an intense resentment has grown due to simultaneous attempts of the West to generally spread its values and institutions, its military and economic superiority in strength, and to intervene in conflicts in the Islamic world.

Fourth, the collapse of communism has removed a mutual enemy of the West and of Islam, after which they came to see each other as the most important threat.

Fifth, increasing conflicts between Muslims and Westerners and their spread on both sides, created a new sense of the singularity of the identity of each and has strengthened the sense of being different from the other.

Therefore this increased attention for Averroes, an important pawn in the light of Islamic revival.

2. Why Averroes?

Averroes (1126-1198) died about 800 years ago in Marakesh, and this symbolic date was commemorated on different locations in the world with colloquia and conferences. It is symbolic because 800 years ago, the work of Averroes had been completely forgotten and unappreciated in Islam, but, ironically enough, was a catalyst, inspirator and provocator, and as such experienced an enormous success, in the Jewish and Latin world: sadly enough, the *Averroes Arabicus*, was not destined the same fate as the *Averroes Hebraeus* and the *Averroes Latinus*. Although apparently conservative, his philosophy was sometimes also too controversial and provocative. Due to his fierce polemic with theologians, he gained a reputation in the West of being a heterodox and a heretic. Siger of Brabant, Boethius of Dacia and their Averroic colleagues from the Faculty of Arts in Paris, did not know however, that such criticism was permitted by the Islam, which, in that respect, has a completely different structure than Christianity. In Christianity, religion and theology are one and the same, that is, theology is the higher, more perfect shape of religion. It has the power to place itself between philosophy and the interpretation of texts from the Holy Scripture by defining *mysteries* which are impenetrable by reason. In the case there is a conflict, reason must submit to the belief, philosophy for theology. In Christian circles, the anti-theological criticism of Averroes, - to which he was entitled by Islamic religion - must have come across as an attack on religion. This explains the misunderstanding about the "secularist" Averroes, which

was spread by, amongst others, Renan and his school, and the slackened attention for Averroes's so called and probably well-meant orthodoxy.

Another reason for speaking about Averroes is the interest in Islam and Islamic philosophy which has increased during the past ten years. This, of course, in the context of the increased rivalry. A latest gain in this respect is the publication of a book by Michael Leenenberg, *Islamitische filosofie. Een geschiedenis*, at Uitgeverij Bulaaq in Amsterdam. For the Arabs, philosophy was a foreign element in their culture. Neither the Khoran, nor the Prophet, mention such a form of reasoning, aside from a few ambiguous sura's. This partly explains the hostility towards philosophy. On the other hand, they have a great interest and openness concerning the exact sciences of the Greeks and Indians: astronomy, medicine, algebra, physics, chemistry. Most philosophers were active in one of these areas, anyway. Just like the Christian world of the Middle ages is controlled by the intellectual clash between Reason and Revelation, so is Islam. Are they roads to the shared goal of the Truth? Can they be reconciled? How do come to the right knowledge? Is the soul immortal? Can philosophical reasoning be used to interpret the Khoran or to structure Law? The most inspiring pages Leenenberg's book are, in my opinion, the ones in which the travelling of thoughts is described: how ideas spread themselves geographically, how they transform, enter into relationships, lose keenness, sometimes dissolve completely or, the opposite: gain strength but in a different shape or with a different name. How ideas, sometimes with an official passport in full daylight, other times completely illegally, with false identity documents, cross borders in order to do their work. In this way, a fascinating landscape is mapped in which philosophy, theology, jurisdiction, science, mysticism and politics meet each other constantly in an intellectual adventure that encompasses the entire Mediterranean.

In the light of the current situation I will not evade in this lecture, a number of Averroes's inspired thoughts on notions such as natural order and counter-order, reason and destruction, destruction of the destruction, coherence and incoherence, negation of the negations, all of which take up a central role in a work like *Tahafut al-Tahafut*. In doing so, I will not hesitate to use certain anachronisms and parallels which, according to my friend Alfred Ivry, is improper in the history of philosophy, but is nevertheless often done with enlightening results. Approaching the Averroists like H el ene V edrine of the

Sorbonne, as pre-Kantians, has proved to be very fruitful because they too struggled with an inner rupture of reason (a pure, theoretical and empirical or practical one), a clash between freedom and causality. They too struggled with the insight that I cannot always bring my knowing in concordance with my being, and that I live in a broken and tragic world. The themes of contemporary philosophy are often embryonic, unconsciously present in the studies done by faraway predecessors. And the heirs often mirror themselves in the work of those who they regard as their authentic or imagined predecessors. Leibniz and Hegel did not always come to terms with the work of Averroes and Maimonides and sometimes found their own work to be prefigured by them and sometimes threatened. Santayana points out the fact that Plato's work can almost synchronously be read as a reading writer and a writing reader (like Sartre) and can thus as it were be seen as a contemporary. In a similar fashion, the historian Frank Ankersmit from Groningen asserts that next to the many interpretations which Derrida likes to attribute to texts about historical events, there is just as much an 'authentic historical experience'⁴ such as for example the graphic artist Escher's experience in the caves of Lascaux which encompassed a period of fifteen thousand years:

*'Yes, it is 'strange stuff', this human mind, that spark that has not extinguished, that seed stayed alive, that thread which we hold in our hands and which connects us, through the soundless, murky dark night, with those who are of the same kind as we, in the cave of Lascaux, a half-light by a kernel drenched in animal fat in a hollow rock. Do you see him sitting there, our brother? He murmurs a language? We don't know. But we know and see something different: he is holding a brush or plug made of animal hair or plant fibres, and rubs with it on a rough, rocky surface. See! A bull's head arises on the rocky wall, an image, so lively that it seems to really move, as if the moist nostrils quiver. Our brother portrays him with such a fierce poignancy that the difference of (a 150) centuries which divides us from them, shrivels to nothing. What difference does it make to us what he looks like; is he not our very own brother?'*⁵

⁴ Frank Ankersmit, *Represtatiecrisis en (historische)ervaring*, Studium Generale Universiteit Utrecht, 1995.

⁵ *Het oneindige. M.C. Escher over eigen werk*, Meulenhoff/Landshoff, 1986, pp. 14-15.

In short, nowadays there is much to say for Schopenhauer's insight 'that in the endless jumble of changes, one still deals with the same, similar and unchangeable being, which acts the same today as it did yesterday and at all times.'

Ernst Bloch, who exaggerates greatly but can also be very inspiring and creative, characterised Averroism as the Marxism of the Middle Ages. Thomas Müntzer attached great importance to Averroes's theory of the numeric unity of the intellect (Material and Active) in the light of the Pentecostal spirit of the Anabaptists. The French Enlightenment is fascinated by this concept of the Active Intellect and finally, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Simone de Beauvoir's "morale de l'ambiguïté" are characterised strongly by Averroes's theory about language and religion in view of his insight about ambivalence and ambiguity. It is also marked by the doctrine of double truth of the Latin Averroists.

Another reason to read Averroes lies in another similarity with our contemporary world. He lived at a time of the advance of the *Reconquista*, with all the external and internal consequences for the Arab province of Andalus - but also with the internal developments within the Islamic world - all things considered, in an explosive world order. This explains the allusions to our contemporary time and the emphasis on Averroes as an important pawn in the Arab Renaissance - or better still: of the Islamic revival - and the ever so controversial modernisation of the Islam. This was already an issue at the time of Averroes, be it in a way of sharpened focus on the diversity and the dialogue within an intellectually layered and strongly monolithic society. Sometimes there is sufficient and sometimes insufficient space for freedom of thought, thought experiments, confrontation, conflict and dialogue. Even Derrida's view on deconstruction is treated, as it were, for the first time in Averroes's work. Finally, there is a source of inspiration for today in the French-Egyptian film *Le Destin* by Yusuf Chahine about the life and work of Averroes. It is a film about enlightened thought and tolerance, awarded a prize on the 50th festival of Cannes in 1997 and directed not only against fundamentalism in Andalus during the 12th Century, but especially against all its contemporary excesses in Egypt.

3. Manners of knowing a ruptured world

I come to a standstill at the apparently modern concept of destruction of the destruction (*Tahafut Altahafut*) or the fascinating coherence of the incoherence and incoherence of the coherence in the light of Ibn Rushd's approach to science. Furthermore concepts such as responsible science and boundaries of science are treated, more precisely the relationship between two manners of knowing a ruptured world. These have a central role in Averroes's work on the opposition between Revelation and Reason. One can also compare this with the rupture of Reason with Kant. Then we contemplate a number of themes and arguments which are remotely or closely related to Averroes's views on sustainability - the social and political-intellectual pillar especially (the ecological and economical, is not treated here) - and all things associated with this such as caution, acute attention for the public and the manner of discussing and debating, justice and fairness. Finally a number of themes will be further examined, especially Averroes's view on three, even four intellectual categories of people: the demonstrative (the philosopher and scientist), the dialectical (theologians) and the rhetorical (people of the superficial and manipulative reasoning). These are therefore the easiest victims of religious publicity and political propaganda.

B. Negation of the Negation

Tahafut al-Tahafut, Destruction of the destruction or incoherence of the incoherence is the title of an important work by Averroes directed against Gazali's *Tahafut Alfalasifa, Destruction of incoherence of the philosophers*. The defence of the latter by Averroes implies the forceful, yet tactful refutation of a reactionary, distorted, theological point of view that makes chaos rule, where first natural, understandable and reasonable order existed. In this world, there was a funded order and a society reflecting the hierarchy of this world within the minds of people: philosophers at the top, under them theologians and still lower the people who are easily influenced by rhetorical language. This order in thought needs to be re-introduced where the narrow and short-sighted implementation of religion has disrupted a natural, spontaneous order of both the world and society. When philosophy can be characterised as a reasonable and enlightening order out of the chaos of imagination, the conceptual and clarifying explanation of an originally incomprehensible and mythical world, theology often indulges in a chaos *ab*

ordine by means of its dialectical proofs, supported by plausible but never exact premises. Hegel's category of the negation and of the negation of the negation, can easily be traced to this remark by Ibn Rushd. This is also true for a whole philosophy of man as a cultural, order-creating creature, but also as a destroyer and an ignoring creature. Because creating order, or rather, new order, comes down to removal (destruction but also preservation at a higher level) of the previous order. The historical topicality can be seen in the dialectic of, amongst others, the recent tension in the economic world order between globalisation and anti-globalisation. The possibilities for destruction in our world have apparently increased enormously, in the light of the finiteness of the system, a thought we are more familiar with now. With our capacities for creating, for example forcing one and the same system onto all situations and cultures, destruction becomes enormous: each day, species, landscapes, cultures, languages, working methods, strategies, insights, schooling etc. disappear. As we remarked at the beginning of this exposé, modern science tries to objectify the world by gaining access to it with increasingly aggressive means. But the further one penetrates into the external world, the more fruitless it becomes. Even more clearly than in science, this Nietzschean shamelessness comes to expression in large-scale technical and industrial applications. In the area of economy and society, the problems that have arisen are still more harrowing: dualism of the world and of one's own society, increasing impoverishment, for Europe, the Schengen Treaty. Surely the awful acts of terror in New York and Washington and Western retaliation in Afghanistan, will mean an absolute turning point in our society, as Leopold Laarmans mentions in *Forum* (nr.12, Oct. 2001). In this precarious period of 2001, the world and all the conventions of society that existed so far, are brutally brought to a stand-still. The new world is going to be a world of darkness and complete impotence. A little bit like the Middle Ages, but with new parameters, like the opposition between poor and rich which has grown to a climax, the globalisation and fanatical religion in all its manifestations. With these three ingredients, "peace" will need to be defined differently, just like the concepts of safety primary needs, future, hope, war. These will all be words of a past order. In short, history starts anew today, and if this new history will also last thousands of years is a question that still needs to be answered. That is why we need to listen attentively to Averroes now, who lived in a comparable day and age and emphasises moderateness, justice, balance, dialogue, reciprocity, feedback, sustainability, as if we are listening to the clarifying language of the current

anti-globalist cultural critics: Noreena Herz and Naomi Klein. The mist of globalisation takes away man's clear view on matters and nurtures uncertainty and unrest. Long before that fear brought together masses of people in the so-called *anti-globalist movement*, the Canadian cultural critic, Naomi Klein, following in the footsteps of Vance Pacquard and Herbert Marcuse, Michel Chossudovsky and Susan George, had described its germs in her debut *No Logo*. Klein convincingly describes how, through the use of logo's, commercials have conquered society in its smallest pores, and how instead of products, they increasingly promote feelings and lifestyles. The increasing advertisement budgets for this *lifestyle branding*, were compensated by multinationals by cutting costs on employees and the care for the environment. The sad diagnosis takes up about half of Klein's book; the catching other half describes the growing protest against globalising injustice.

The concrete, tangible results of the vague, abstract globalisation, have become strikingly current since September 11th: the attacks on the WTC and the threat of biological weapons, have brusquely made an issue of securing food, water and transport. It is clear that the defence system of the U.S. has failed: an investment has been made in the military protection in space instead of in infrastructure. In the mean time, the public services are being rediscovered by the masses: one wonders if it is responsible behaviour to have private security businesses watch for the safety on airports, people cheer for the work of fire-fighters, policemen and doctors. This is a perfect chance to refocus our attention from the symbols of globalisation to the core of the problem. We have to make clear *why* the public services have eroded and then make clear how things can really change. In the context of the great migration problems and terrorism of today, we have to be reminded again of the politics practised by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World bank which accompanied a politics of economic deterioration which formed the fundamentals for an explosive world order ⁶. The populist "word-

⁶ Explosive was what the world of Averroes was too (1126-1198). In 1775 Abdul Rakhman, the last survivor of the Omadjadan, landed when fleeing from the Abassids in Spain. He succeeded in starting a new dynasty. The climax of this dynasty was formed by the government of Abdal Rakhman (III) (912-961), who restored the power of the caliphate of Cordoba, partly due to a 'hired legion' of Slavic prisoners of war. It is known of his son that he collected more than 400.000 (!) books. From the 9th Century onward, the

violence” of our politicians concerns not only the results of an economic world system, which, from year to year contributes further to the disorder, misery, hatred and war. It concerns a future, desperate Europe, which now already looks like a concrete island, in which regions long to become new, small, simple, also concrete islands. An island protected by the “soldateska” who took up a post on the high walls on his border, shortly after the breakdown of the Berlin Wall. Small islands sometimes, who try to co-operate on the basis of distrust, but are imprisoned by their short-sighted egocentric politics of their national little dictators. We conclude this excursion with the considerations of Tahar ben Yellun about Fort Europe, with his remark that the Arab world needs to be helped out of its identity crisis and that Islamic fundamentalism does not appear out of the blue; it is mostly a reaction to the humiliation by the West. What the Arab world seeks is, above all, recognition, a new self-respect, a new dignity.

Richard Rorty, attributes far-reaching consequences to this splintered end of history and philosophy, not only intellectual, but also cultural and political ones. After the disintegration of the philosophy of rational truth, after the break-down of the large, encompassing framework, the only thing still standing, the last certainty on which we can fall back in chaotic times is the group to which we feel we belong, our own ethnic entity. With this remark, Rorty explains the current day revival of *Blut und Boden*-movements and the primitive violence that puts pressure on Western social-democracies and the U.S. from inside. He also explains the ethnic-religious blood-thirst which came to an explosion in former Yugoslavia, after the Communist house in which they previously lived peacefully, collapsed. In the same way, one could fall back, like now, on one’s own culture, one’s own religion, one’s

· cities strive more and more for autonomy: 23 city-states are founded of which some of the most important are Seville, Saragossa, Valencia, Toledo and Cordoba. Under the pressure of the Reconquista movement from the Christian North, lead by Alphonsus VI of Castile, Islamic Spain, ‘Alandalus’ is reunited in 1147 by the Berber dynasty of Almoravids, located in Marrakesh. It is followed in 1147 by the Almohads (“an even more intolerant sect, which, contrary to the Almoravids, had adopted kalam doctrines, influenced by al-Ghazali”, PINES, *Cambr.*, 815). Under the son of Yusuf Djakub (the “patron” of Ibn Rushd) the Reconquista will increase in speed: Cordoba falls in 1236, Seville in 1248. Only the kingdom of Granada will last another two Centuries (until 1492).

own qualitatively higher society, as it is regarded. This is Samuel Huntington's position in his book *Clash of Civilisations* which caused much ado. Derrida and Rorty speak about the dialectic between order and disorder: in their view, one philosophical truth that covers everything is impossible - just like there is no one physical truth or one political-economical truth - and partial truths, including their discrepancies, need to co-exist side by side. And again we end up with Averroes who revealed this truth to us 800 years ago, in a world order which was equally explosive as ours, on which I will not elaborate here.

C. Sustainability and Moderation: Themes and Arguments

When we speak of sustainability in the philosophy of Averroes, we refer to different aspects of his thinking in the light of the framework of a few of the important theses and arguments attributed to him and especially to his "political Averroism" as it was later called. In the middle ages the following five statements were considered characteristic of this philosophy: (1) The world is eternal; (2) God does not know particulars and there is no Providence; (3) There is no free will; (4) The possible intellect is one numerically, as is the active intellect; hence there is no individual immortality nor individual moral responsibility; (5) Philosophy and theology are contradictory to one another and the supernatural must be rejected. The fifth point - the 'theory of the double truth' - is simply a distortion from outside of Ibn Rushd's hierarchical conception. Its second aspect, like points (1), (2) and (3), is no more than an extrapolation drawn from the commentaries alone and presented not just as an explanation given on a specific point of Aristotle's work, but as Ibn Rushd's thought itself. Ibn Rushd gives very specific and entirely explicit solutions to points (1) and (2). As we have also seen, he gives a somewhat modified response on point (3) but clearly opposes Ibn Tumulart's idea of predestination. On the other hand it is more difficult to pronounce on the fourth point, described by Saint Thomas Aquinas as 'the most shameful error' amongst the theses attributed to Ibn Rushd. Readers of 'Averroes' have indeed found in the works translated under this name elements which permit the formulation of this 'technical solution' - which is no longer a simple general position like the theory of the double truth but a response to specific problems which are also not specifically Aristotelian. What is it, then, that leads Ibn Rushd to consider this question, and does his overall approach shed light on the solution he

gives - a solution on which, moreover, the specialists are far from being agreed?

As far as the themes are concerned, of which we will highlight a few here, the following are memorable:

1. Eternity, more so: eternal creation of the world and of thinking.
2. Eternity of philosophy: it is always realised in one or other current philosophy. According to Albertus Magnus, Averroes's worst mistake has been the position that not only the world is eternal but that also people, the sciences and philosophy are: "Averroes seems to assert that man, the arts and philosophy have never experienced an interruption and never will stop existing. Because, if by some movement of the celestial bodies they should disappear into one part of the world, then they have not disappeared out of another part: according to him, they have always been and always will be."⁷
3. Philosophers play an important role in reaching a consensus (*Idjma*) within the community. Philosophy is the only spiritual authority in solving difficult discussions and interpretations of the Qur'an. Philosophers constitute the decisive group that realises the consensus. This consensus implies a form of social pressure on the realisation of new interpretations of controversial texts. It is important to note in this respect, the relationship between the philosopher and the sovereign of the state: it is especially important to consider the requirements for the ideal statesman.
4. The harmonisation between belief and science implies the necessity of an enlightened community. Philosophers have to succeed in combining a personal perspective with the care for public wellbeing. A balanced approach of philosophy, science as well as religion is necessary, just like the realisation of a real community of researchers.

So when the Averroists argue for a 'double-truth' theory they have Averroes on their side to a degree. He would happily concede that there are different ways of establishing propositions in different universes of discourse. He would not be happy at being credited with the idea that these universes of discourse exist in splendid isolation, however. As we shall see throughout these lectures, Averroes did emphasize the differences between religious and philosophical language, yet also argued that both types of language describe the same reality. They describe it in different ways for different purposes for

⁷ According to Averroes, *De anima*, III, Comm.5 Crawford, p. 408, 613-619.

different audiences. But these different ways of talking are not autonomous activities which operate separately from each other. There would be little point to them if they had this character. For example, if it follows from Averroes's arguments that individual immortality of the soul is an unsatisfactory concept, it follows that some explanation must be given of how Islam can talk about such a form of immortality. And of course he provides such an explanation, in terms of the political relevance of the notion for the community as a whole and its role as representative of the more accurate and somewhat different philosophical notions of immortality. To argue that Averroes succeeds in disproving the coherence of the notion of individual immortality philosophically makes it puzzling to know what one is taken to believe in when one says that none the less one must believe in the truth of the individual immortality of the soul for religious reasons.

5. In order to be able to interpret Averroes's description of the diversity of paths to reach the truth, we must grasp his theory on meaning. Contrary to his philosophical predecessors (like Maimonides), he assigns a great deal of importance to the notion of ambiguity in language. The relatively free use of similar names allows him to discuss difficulties that people have in understanding what those names mean. Their meanings are different depending on the context in which they are used, even though they are not entirely different and distinct. Averroes has in mind the harmonic (despite the fact that it is a very difficult) convergence between three perspectives or approaches: the demonstrative (scientific, logical), the dialectical (especially socially important) and the rhetorical (sensitive, oratorical, artistic). Anyone trying to understand Ibn Rushd comes up against a major obstacle, namely the amazing variety of levels on which he stands. From the point of view of his own period, he was sometimes the jurist relying on traditional knowledge and at others the religious thinker addressing an enlightened public though of a principally Muslim educational background. Sometimes he was the scientist and sometimes the specialist in a knowledge passed down from Antiquity and, in a sense, esoteric. In his own view there were diverse modes of expression corresponding to the various intellectual levels, although the hierarchy was not totally fixed - sometimes the common people and the philosopher would unite against the dialectician while at others the latter is on an intermediate level between these two. Sometimes the level of expression of the common people is further divided into subsections (poetic or rhetoric). At times he emphasizes the divisions, and at others lingers on

one of these levels to define its possibilities envisaged in themselves. Finally, with regard to philosophy in general, he adopts three different perspectives (or perhaps even four including the 'questions') on the work of Aristotle, which is however almost presented as an absolute, and without this corresponding to different audiences ⁸.

6. Averroes, just like Plato and Aristotle, has an organically integrated view of society, of which the different parts or functions are attuned to a better flow and effective "circulation" of the whole. The first and theoretical part of this science proves that the human perfections are really of four kinds - speculative, intellectual, ethical, and practical - but these are not equal in status. The speculative virtues are the most important, and the others are steps on the ladder to their attainment. It is more or less impossible for an individual to excell in all the perfections, but it is possible for a combination of individuals to produce jointly all the perfections. Averroes makes the Aristotelian point that human beings are political animals in that they require others in order to acquire even one of the perfections. We need society not just in order to reach human perfections, but also to satisfy the necessities of life, and the very varied activities of different citizens constructs a social whole in which an acceptable life style is possible. Plato compares the parts of the state to the parts of the soul, so that the state is run wisely if the speculative citizens are in charge of the other less rational individuals, just as a person is wise if his rational faculties are in control of his other personality traits. Averroes understands Plato to be arguing that justice is a state of affairs where each citizen follows the activity for which he or she is most fitted by nature. But this is only possible if such citizens are under the authority of those most skilled in the speculative sciences, just as justice in a single person is dependent upon control by the intellect of the other aspects of personality. Wisdom and courage are restricted to particular groups in society, while justice and temperance (or prudence) are present in all classes of people. Some virtues are found more in some groups of people than in others, and the Greeks are credited with strength in the speculative sciences, while the Kurds and Galicians are predominantly courageous. Nature is important here, since Plato argues that everyone is provided by nature with a tendency to be skilful in only one form of activity. Those who are in charge of the security of the state, the guardians, should be chosen from those who

⁸ Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd (Averroes)*, p. 99-100

are physically strong and quick and shrewd; they must be naturally courageous and brought up from childhood to prepare for their martial role. Averroes runs through Plato's arguments here, as he does through his remarks on education, on the danger of listening to poetry and stories which excite physical desires and on the use of music pedagogically. Some of the Platonic arguments in favour of the abolition of private property, the desirable disappearance of gold and silver, the appropriate size of cities, not to mention the communal living arrangements for women and children, are very different from Islamic forms of life, and yet Averroes produces summaries of Plato's ideas for such social arrangements without much in the way of personal comment.

7. The active intellect as "realm of the truth", as "structure of the whole", as "soul of the world", as "objective mind" (Hegel) integrates the different individual insights and moments of knowledge, which interplay and reinforce each other when re-coupling. By means of a balanced integration of a multitude of viewpoints, perspectives and insights, we come to a permanent activation of thinking and to a realisation of what is called in semiotics, a "reserve of expressions": a whole of communicative possibilities in a person or a community, of which only a few are active at the same time. If divine wisdom produces an ordered world, by bringing into actuality potential forms which group concrete individuals into genera and species, so, inversely, through the act of abstraction the human spirit can make these forms exist separately. This is both the most characteristic act of man and that which brings him closest to divinity. While this may legitimately seem to suggest neoplatonism, the preceding discussion demonstrates that it should not necessarily be related to it but rather that it arises from within the Rushdian problematic itself. There is nothing real but the concrete, hence the intelligible being of forms cannot be conceived except as corresponding to a level in the hierarchical structure of existing things where they may have purely intellectual status. Ibn Rushd finds this in the hypothesis of separate intelligences moving the celestial bodies in a manner comparable to the movement of the lover by the loved one, but also of a universal and continuous movement since any individual character could only come from the senses and the imagination which are absent at this level. Thus the hierarchical structure of the universe and not a mystical type of perspective governs the status of the intellect. The latter, through the simple fact of understanding, i.e. conceptualizing the real, must go back from one

intelligible to another towards the organizing wisdom of everything. *Consequently, the diverse themes of Providence, the hierarchical structure of the universe and the pivotal role of the human intellect unite in what has come to be called the doctrine of the unity of the intellect.* The essential element of this doctrine is the notion of the eternity of the intelligible. To understand this, we have to return right to the very beginning in Aristotle's polemic against both the Megarians and Plato on the question of the appropriateness of conceptual language (universal) to concrete data (particular) (*Metaphysics* 1046, b30). Through this particular aspect, the entire problem of the soundness of thought is advanced. Why do all spirits function in the same way? When the individual stops thinking momentarily or definitively, does the truth cease to exist? The Megarians maintain that a concept can only be attributed to an object when the latter demonstrates it in actuality (the architect is only an architect when he actually constructs). Aristotle does not want to bring in the Platonic doctrine of 'participation' in the Idea. He therefore has to invoke the regression of the same being from potential to actuality, and then back to potential, etc. Thus the architect is always an architect from the moment he has learnt his profession, and even when he is not engaged in construction or when he momentarily forgets his skill. The Aristotelian solution is thus to expand' experience: momentary contact with the concrete is not enough to justify the attribution of a concept; what is needed is a repetition of this contact, the grasping of a process. If the spirit sticks' to this process, there can be no error. Ibn Rushd simply follows the same logic, extending the analysis to the level of the human species. The individual does not always think the intelligible, but the human species always thinks it, to the extent that Ibn Rushd considers it impossible for it to disappear⁹. The material intellect, so named because like the prime matter it can change into all things, is always thinking within the activity of the human species - hence the intelligible is eternal. The individual man only loses contact with it through the disappearance of the 'passive powers', i.e. the forms of the imagination, that are corruptible.

The theme of the unity of the intellect was already present in Ibn Bajja's work, but in a completely different context. Ibn Bajja principally describes a 'genesis of thought', whereas in Ibn Rushd's work there is 'la progression to

⁹ *Large commentary on De Anima*, ed. Crawford, p.448.

metaphysical analysis' ¹⁰. This theme enables us to understand not only the 'soundness' of thought, but also, as a result, the philosophical approach advocated by Ibn Rushd. The material intellect reaches perfection (*perfici*) through its own act of understanding material forms, and reaches it to an even greater extent in turning to immaterial forms 'intelligible in themselves', in particular the agent Intellect. Thus it reaches the level of the eternity of thought ¹¹. The term 'union' or conjunction' (*ittisal, conjunctio*) to the agent Intellect is used to describe the process by which the material intellect, which is nothing in actuality, becomes what it thinks and is united with the intelligible. It assumes a preparation involving the gradual acquisition of science, although the end of this process is itself beyond speculative science.

In this first lecture, we will direct our attention towards two of the themes mentioned:

1. The sovereign of the state
2. The difficult convergence of three kinds of people:
 - a. The scientists/philosophers, the people of demonstrative argumentation
 - b. The theologians or the people of the approximate, the probable argumentation
 - c. The rhetorics or impressionable people, who are barely able to analyse and approach reality critically.

D. Divine Law and Human Wishes

Averroes's discussion of Plato's *Republic* is an unusual aspect of his corpus. It is his only known treatment of Plato, and is difficult to classify as a text. It shares some of the characteristics of a paraphrase, since there is quite a lot of material which merely replicates and abbreviates Plato's text (as represented in Arabic), and there are many changes in the text to relate more easily the discussion to contemporary social and political conditions ¹². On the other hand, the text seems also to be rather like a middle commentary, with some

¹⁰ Jolivet, *Annuaire de l'E.P.H.E.* 1970-1, p.321.

¹¹ ed. Crawford, p.450.

¹² Oliver Leaman, *Averroes and his Philosophy*, Clarendon Press – Oxford, 1988, p. 119 sq.

analysis of Plato's arguments and a very definite selection of passages and exclusion of others on philosophical grounds. There is also the problem that there is no decent Arabic manuscript extant, and there are arguments about the reliability and integrity of the surviving Hebrew translations. The difficulties of the text and the consequent problems with translation have led to scholarly debates over the nature of Averroes's intentions which have reached heights of acerbity rare even within the restricted community of those concerned with *falsafa*¹³.

There is no lack of unity in Averroes's work. He begins his book by declaring as his intention the separation of demonstrative from dialectical arguments in Plato's text, and he finishes off on the same sort of note. In between he lays down his view of the nature of practical philosophy. Political science is part of practical philosophy, and regulates the appropriate behaviour of human beings in communities. The objects of political science are volitional acts which are produced by our free will and chosen after rational thought. By way of contrast with the theoretical sciences, political science does not have abstract knowledge as its goal, but practical action. This is not to say that reason does not enter into the working out of political science. Averroes produces within this context the well-worn example of medicine, which involves both a theoretical and a practical aspect. The theoretical aspect of political science involves the analysis of human conduct as such, and is, according to Averroes, covered in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The practical aspect can be found in his *Politics*, but, since this was not available to him, Plato's *Republic* had to do instead. The first and theoretical part of this science proves that the human perfections are really of four kinds - speculative, intellectual, ethical, and practical - but these are not equal in status. The speculative virtues are the most important, and the others are steps on the ladder to their attainment. It is more or less impossible for an individual to excel in all the perfections, but it is possible for a combination of individuals to produce jointly all the perfections. Averroes makes the Aristotelian point that human beings are political animals in that they require others in order to acquire even one of the perfections. We need society not just in order to reach human perfections, but also to satisfy the necessities of life, and the very varied activities of different citizens constructs a social

¹³ A prime example of orientalist waspishness is the review of Rosenthal's edition by J. Teicher, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 5 (1960), 176-95.

whole in which an acceptable life style is possible. Plato compares the parts of the state to the parts of the soul, so that the state is run wisely if the speculative citizens are in charge of the other less rational individuals, just as a person is wise if his rational faculties are in control of his other personality traits.

Averroes understands Plato to be arguing that justice is a state of affairs where each citizen follows the activity for which he or she is most fitted by nature. But this is only possible if such citizens are under the authority of those most skilled in the speculative sciences, just as justice in a single person is dependent upon control by the intellect of the other aspects of personality. Wisdom and courage are restricted to particular groups in society, while justice and temperance (or prudence) are present in all classes of people. Some virtues are found more in some groups of people than in others, and the Greeks are credited with strength in the speculative sciences, while the Kurds and Galicians are predominantly courageous. Nature is important here, since Plato argues that everyone is provided by nature with a tendency to be skilful in only one form of activity. Those who are in charge of the security of the state, the guardians, should be chosen from those who are physically strong and quick and shrewd; they must be naturally courageous and brought up from childhood to prepare for their martial role. Averroes runs through Plato's arguments here, as he does through his remarks on education, on the danger of listening to poetry and stories which excite physical desires and on the use of music pedagogically. Some of the Platonic arguments in favor of the abolition of private property, the desirable disappearance of gold and silver, the appropriate size of cities, not to mention the communal living arrangements for women and children, are very different from Islamic forms of life, and yet Averroes produces summaries of Plato's ideas for such social arrangements without much in the way of personal comment.

In the second book of his discussion, Averroes starts by looking at the nature of the philosophers and the sort of education they ought to receive. The philosopher is intent on examining the truth without its material trappings, the pure forms or ideas which lie behind our use of concepts in the empirical world. The philosopher has to combine all the theoretical and practical virtues, and have the ability to teach both through the use of demonstrative reason and through rhetorical and poetic methods. The ruler of the state must

combine a number of qualities of king, lawgiver, and philosopher, all aspects of the nature of the *imam*. The ruler is expected to have the following natural traits: (1) he must be naturally disposed to the study of the theoretical sciences, thus enabling him to distinguish the essential from the accidental; (2) he must have good powers of retention of information; (3) he must be interested in all forms of theoretical enquiry; (4) he must love the truth and hate the false; (5) he must turn his appetites away from sensual pleasures; (6) he must not love money; (7) he must have noble sentiments; (8) he must be brave; and (9) he must always seek to attain the good and the beautiful. On top of all this, he should be a good orator, quick-witted in the sense of being able to seize rapidly the middle term of a syllogism¹⁴, and able to present his arguments in a simplified and accessible form. Yet, although kings ought to be philosophers, in existing cities they are not, as both Plato and Averroes admit. These states do not follow the example of those who are really wise, thinking that they can be governed by people who are not philosophers. In any case it is very difficult to find a philosopher who has the qualities appropriate for a leading political role in the state. Few philosophers possess the glowing list of attributes listed above.

In the third and last section Averroes discusses Plato's account of the constitutions of different states. The best kind of state is that which is ruled by the sort of ideal politician described in the second section. Next step down is timocracy, a state based upon the ideology of honor. Then comes oligarchy, rule by the few, and a few dominated by the desire for wealth. Fourth is democracy and fifth tyranny. The best kind of government can be either a monarchy or an aristocracy, while Averroes adds two other forms of regime, government by someone who only seeks to please himself, and government formed out of necessity. He repeats Plato's explanation of the transformation of one form of government into another, and analyses in some depth the nature of different kinds of state and the personalities of their citizens and rulers. Towards the end of his third section he makes some rather critical remarks about Plato's putative fondness for non-demonstrative arguments, and refuses to discuss the tenth book of the *Republic* or the first book due to their high dialectical content. He seems to think that everything else which Plato discusses is worth considering, albeit not necessarily to be

¹⁴ For more on this characteristic, see *Avicenna's Psychology*, ed. and trans. F. Rahman (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1952), 36.

accepted as valid. There are points in the discussion in which he actually intervenes by correcting Plato by reference to Aristotle, but on the whole he does not do this. As we suggested initially, it is difficult to define the precise nature of this text, especially, as we shall see, since Averroes regarded it as a propaedeutic to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

E. Intellectual Human “Races”

Ibn Rushd was not only a great commentator but also an original thinker. Yet, and that was most probably inevitable, his original philosophical production was negatively influenced by this activities as a commentator. His original works cover merely a limited field of philosophy, first and foremost the relation between philosophy and religion and his study of intellect. He has not written an encompassing presentation of his system (like Ibn Sina’s *Shifa*).

1. The Deal between Philosophy and Religion ¹⁵

In *Fasl al-Maqâl*, the tract that was dedicated especially to this theme, he starts by proving that the Law makes philosophy, as a striving for knowledge from the Creator and the Creator, binding¹⁶. (Ibn Rushd hereby works with the five traditional juridical categories, or judicial qualifications: mandatory, recommended, permitted, reprehensible, forbidden). Seeing as it is obvious that in doing so, one uses the most perfect methods of demonstration – the scientific-, one thus needs to study logic. Thereby it is not more than reasonable that one profits from the knowledge which earlier generations have acquired about this, even if they did not yet know the true religion; it is after all a means, an instrument. The same counts for philosophy in general. “From this it is obvious that the study of Ancient books is mandatory by Law”.

¹⁵ See Herman De Ley’s position in *The Philosophy of the Middle Ages*, Rijksuniversiteit Gent, 1977-1978.

¹⁶ He uses texts from the Qur’an in doing so. For example: “Summon for the road of the Lord through wisdom (*hikma*, synonymous for *falsafa*) and benevolent admonitions and when you discuss with them, use the most beautiful plea”, Soera 16.125,

But this counts only for those who are able to do so: Ibn Rushd, then continues by postulating “intellectual human races”. For this he uses Aristotle’s classification of the syllogisms and of the Qur’an texts cited earlier: he distinguishes:

1. the “demonstrative people”, namely the people of scientific proof, in other words, the philosophers, cf. “wisdom” in the Qur’an (with Aristotle: the “apodeic syllogism”, which departs from certain premises);
2. the “dialectical people”, namely theologians, cf. “the most beautiful plea” in the Qur’an (with Aristotle: “the dialectical syllogism” which departs from probable premises);
3. the “rhetorical people”, namely the mass, cf. “benevolent admonitions” in the Qur’an (with Aristotle: the “rhetorical syllogism”: primarily plays on emotions, the imagination etc. of people, in order to lead people to carrying out certain acts).

“Since all this is now established, and since we, the Muslim community, hold that this divine Law of ours is true, and that it is this Law that incites and summons us to the happiness that consists in the knowledge of God, Mighty and Majestic, and of His creation, than [end] is appointed for every Muslim by the method of assent that his temperament and nature require. For the natures of men are on different levels with respect to [their paths to] assent. One of them comes to assent through demonstration; another comes to assent through dialectical arguments, just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstration, since his nature does not contain any greater capacity; while another comes to assent through rhetorical arguments, again just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstrative arguments”
17

He continues by asserting that philosophy contains nothing that conflicts with the Islam:

“Now since this Law is true and summons to the study that leads to knowledge of the truth, we the Muslim community know definitely that demonstrative study does not lead to [conclusions] conflicting with what is

¹⁷ Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (ed.), *Medieval Political Philosophy: a Sourcebook*, Cornell University Press, 1963, p. 169.

given in the Law; for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it.”¹⁸

Abdurrahman Badawi¹⁹ hereby correctly remarks that this passage forms the cornerstone of Averroes’s complete theory concerning the relation between belief and religion: One cannot emphasize enough, its capital importance for the understanding of this theory”. According to Averroes, there *can* be no opposition between philosophy and religion, seeing as they both express the one Truth. In case a contradiction exists between the superficial, literal meaning of a Qur’an text and the conclusions of science, then the Qur’an text may or rather *should* be interpreted allegorically. He defines this “allegorical interpretation” (*ta’wil*) as :

“An extension of the meaning of an expression from the realistic to the metaphorical meaning, without thereby failing towards the standard practice of Arabic, by metaphorically naming something after something which it resembles, or after its cause or effect ...”

The Qur’an itself imposes it, cfr. Soura 3.7:

“It is he who has sent the Scripture, in which his becoming signs, which are the Mother of the Scripture and others still, contingent ... But not knows the explanation of them (of the contingent), another than Allah and those standing solidly in knowledge.”

The use of the *ta’wil* is restricted to the scholars by God. And where the jurists use it profusely, with how much more rights can the philosopher claim it, in using scientific arguments. The explanation for the fact that the Qur’an has a double meaning, should be sought in the different intellectual capacities of the people. But when a consensus exists (*idjma*) in the *oemma* that a certain text should be understood literally, then the philosopher should also keep to it, in case this consensus can be established with certainty. This is only possible concerning practical guidelines, not concerning theoretical problems. Consequently, Algazel condemnation of Alfarabi and Ibn Sina as “

¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁹ *Histoire de la Philosophie en Islam. Etudes de Philosophie médiévale*, 60 Vol. I-II, Paris, 1972, p. 778.

disbelievers” does not have a definitive character. For that matter, theologians also use God’s knowledge and the resurrection of the allegorical interpretation with regard to problems concerning the eternity of the world. Averroes reverses the positions here: often the *moetakallimoen* make inappropriate and unscientific use of the *ta’wil*.

The texts of the Qur’an are divided into three groups:

1. texts that everyone, also “demonstrative people,” should understand literally because they are demonstrable by means of three types of arguments: for example: the existence of God, the sending of the Prophet, etc.:
2. texts that the lower classes need to accept in their literal meaning, but must be interpreted allegorically by the “demonstrative” (“if such people take them in their literal meaning, it makes them disbelievers!”): for example the problem of God’s “place”;
3. texts of which the classification is uncertain and whereby mistakes made by philosophers are pardonable: for example life after death. Such allegorical interpretations may not be revealed to the lower classes:

*“Therefore interpretations ought to be set down only in demonstrative books, because if they are in demonstrative books they are encountered by no one but men of the demonstrative class. But if they are set down in other than demonstrative books and one deals with them by poetical, rhetorical, or dialectical methods, as Abu Hamid (Algazel) does, then he commits an offence against the Law and against philosophy, even though the fellow intended nothing but good.”*²⁰

Such books, that contain wisdom for all except the scholars, should be forbidden by the imams of the Muslims (this does not count for scientific works to such an extent, because they only go to the hands of philosophers.) The Holy Scripture has as its purpose: the proclamation of true knowledge (regarding God and creation) and the correct practice, that is the acts which lead to bliss for man. Seeing as it directs itself in the first place to the majority, it mainly contains dialectical and rhetorical arguments; the concepts are taught especially through symbols. The élite, which has to apply an allegorical interpretation, may not make it public to the people: diverting

²⁰ Lerner-Mahdi, p. 178

someone who can understand no better, from the letter of the law, means that his belief is being destroyed and thus his chance for bliss. Averroes wants to emphasize here the fact that there is but one Truth and that it is of capital importance that each every human, each on his level and with his intellectual capacity, turns to that one Truth:

*"Ibn Rushd's original contribution is to stress thus the importance of adherence to the truth. Men understand it through the ways which gain their assent; the majority consent to something because of what they themselves are, rather than because of what the thing itself is. Their truth is subjective. Incapable of adopting a rational objective attitude which would govern their personal reactions, they have to have their personal sensibility affected in order to accept what is proposed to them"*²¹.

Finally, the *moetkallimoen* get another lashing because they are responsible for rise of sects and the hatred and war amongst Muslims:

*"It was to be accounted for by the allegorical interpretations – especially untrue ones – and the supposition that such interpretations of the Scripture should be announced to everyone, that Islamic sects came into existence, with the result that each was accusing the other of disbelief and heresy. In this way the Moesalites interpreted many verses and traditions in an allegorical manner and announced their interpretations to the masses, and the Asharites did the same, although they used such interpretations less frequently. As a result of this, they plunged the people into hatred, mutual loathing, tore the Scripture to pieces and brought complete discord amongst the people"*²².

Until so far the main lines of the *Fasl al-Maqâl*. What should one conclude? That Ibn Rushd was a "rationalist" – cfr. the notion of thinkers of the Middle Ages that Averroes was a representative of disbelief and contempt for existing religions? Or that he, on the contrary, was a righteous and orthodox Muslim? Both interpretations have found their defendants²³. D. Gauthier,

²¹ Arnaldez, "Ibn Rushd", in *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, III, New Edition, Leiden, 1960, pp. 913.

²² Ibidem, p. 183

²³ See Badawi, o.c. pp. 766 sq.

who dedicated a doctorate to the problem ²⁴, defends the first interpretation, but within the frame of Ibn Rushd's distinction between three intellectual categories of people: "la doctrine philosophique qui s'en dégage est un rationalisme sans réserve" (p.108); but this rationalism implies no open hostility towards religion and traditional belief ²⁵. On the other and, with regard to Averroes's positive comments concerning miracles, mysteries and the such, these were only intended as symbols for the people and concerned none of the adequate, philosophical knowledge that depends only on the demonstration based on rational evidence. According to Gauthier (o.c. pp. 179-181) one may therefore not ask if Ibn Rushd was a rationalist. But: with respect to whom is he a rationalist and with respect to whom is he not?

"Il est rationaliste absolu tant qu'il s'adresse aux philosophes, c-à-d à des hommes de démonstration, d'évidence rationnelle; ceux-là doivent interpréter tous les textes obscurs: il n'y a pour eux ni mystère ni miracles proprement dits. Il est antirationaliste, fidéiste, quand il s'agit du vulgaire, c-à-d des hommes d'arguments oratoires, ou comme il les appelle encore, des hommes d'exhortation, incapables de suivre une démonstration rationnelle: ceux-là doivent prendre à la lettre tous les symboles, tous les textes obscurs, sans exception. Quant à la troisième catégorie d'esprits, intermédiaire entre les deux autres, à savoir les hommes d'arguments dialectiques, les théologiens, capables d'apercevoir les difficultés des textes et d'épiloguer sur ces difficultés, mais impuissant à en comprendre la véritable interprétation, les philosophes doivent administrer, en quelque sorte, à ces esprits malades, comme seul remède dont leur mal dialectique soit susceptible, des interprétations d'ordre inférieur, appropriées à leur état d'âme, à leur genre d'esprit anormal et hybride: des interprétations semi-rationaliste, semi-fidéistes".

But *conditio sine qua non* for a deal between philosophy and religion is that the philosophers, in no case, may reveal their scientific interpretations to the other two classes ²⁶. In agreement with P.M. Alonso ²⁷, Badawi states ²⁸,

²⁴ L. Gauthier, *La théorie d'Ibn Rochd (Averroès) sur les rapports de la religion et de la philosophie*, Lecoux, Paris, 1909.

²⁵ Criticism on the view taken by E. Renan, *Averroes et l'Averroïsme*, 1882

²⁶ Gauthier in Badawi, o.c. p. 769.

²⁷ P.M. Alonso, *Teologia de Averroes*, Madrid-Granada, 1947, p. 109 sq.

questions this “rationalism”: it is beyond doubt that Ibn Rushd believed sincerely in the Qur’an as the book that was revealed by God to Muhammed, his Prophet – the Muslim witnesses confirm that he carried out the ritual commandments punctually. The character of the Qur’an is not questioned by him in a single text:

*“Il n’a jamais soumis le Qoran à une critique historique ou philologique ou doctrinale. Il ne ressemble à cet égard, ni de loin ni de près, à Muhammad, ibn Zakaryya al Razi, ni à Ibn al –Rawandi. Le considérer hérétique ou impie à la manière de ces deux penseurs serait une erreur capitale”*²⁹

Even though it is correct that *Fasl al-Maqâl* does not use a single word that would indicate a thought of the author in the direction of the subordination of philosophy to religion³⁰, then it still seems to little to justify qualifying him as “rationalist”³¹. But the greatest flaw of Gauthier’s interpretation lies in the fact that he is obliged to ignore the unmistakably fideic passage from the *Tahafoet* and the *Manahish*:

*“Ces textes ne sauraient offrir q’une importance secondaire pur la question de l’accord entre la philosophie et la religion, puisque le Fasl al–Maqal néglige les point qu’ils traitent; et puisqu’ils ne peuvent contredire la doctrine du Fasl, ils doivent admettre une interprétation rationaliste”*³²

In the two works – which are from the same period as the *Fasl*, - it seems that Ibn Rushd strongly tones down the independence and equality between philosophy and religion:

1. He emphasizes that the religion directs itself towards all people, and that its instruction is also of importance for the philosophers’ class which, after all, is brought up within a certain religion:

“The religions strive towards the same goal as philosophy, by means of a path that is accessible for all; therefore, according to philosophers, they are

²⁸ Abdurrahman Badawi, *Histoire de la Philosophie en Islam. Etudes de Philosophie médiévale*, 60, Vol. I-II, Paris, 1972, p. 774.

²⁹ Badawi, o.c. pp. 775 sq.

³⁰ Gauthier, o.c. p. 108.

³¹ Especially an “absolute rationalism” (Gauthier) implies the rejection of every godly revelation and of the supernatural in general.

³² Gauthier, o.c. p. 131, cited by Badawi, p. 774.

necessary. Because philosophy plays its role as master of bliss only for part of the intelligent people, namely those who study philosophy; the religions, on the other hand, have the intention of educating all people without exception. Seeing as the particular class (of philosophers) does not exist and cannot reach its happiness without participation of the general class, general instruction is necessary for the existence and the life of the particular class. As far as childhood and upbringing is concerned; no one doubts this. As for the time when it passes to its particular state, it is necessary for achieving excellence that it does not turn away from that in which it was raised and that it uses the best interpretations. It must realize that religious education is aimed towards the majority and not towards the élite. In case it expresses its doubts regarding principles of the religion in which it was raised, or if it brings forward an interpretation that is contradictory to what the Prophets teach, and leads them off their way, in that case, the person who does such things, deserves to be branded as a disbeliever and should be punished with the punishment which is intended by his religion for the godlessness.”³³

At the same time this work shows a tendency towards more understanding of the other religions: in the *Fasl*, Ibn Rushd still seems to regard the Islam as the only true religion, now he presents it as the last in a row and the most perfect of a series religions (of revelation) which are increasingly better adapted to their shared goal: realizing bliss for people in general in this life and hereafter. They do this through prescriptions, promises and warnings, based upon symbols, whereas the people-of-science are put on their way to the Truth through allusions which only they can understand. This approach, which are summarized in expressions as *omnes leges*, “all laws”, and *loquentes trium legum quae hodie sunt*, “the apologetics of the three laws that exist today”, should not be understood as “une généralisation hardie” and proof of religious indifference³⁴. As Badawi³⁵ emphasizes, this concerns “the pure doctrine of the Qur’an” regarding Christians, Jews and other ‘People of the Book’. Ibn Rushd also adds to this that although all religions seem true in the eyes of the philosopher, he should choose the best religion of his time:

³³ *Tahafut Altahafut*, pp. 582-3 ed. Bouyges, Badawi, pp. 783-4.

³⁴ According to Renan, o.c., p.166

³⁵ O.c. p.785.

“That is why the philosophers who taught in Alexandria converted to the Islam when the Islamic Law came to them and the philosophers who came to live in Roman land converted to Christianity when the religion of Jesus came to them” ³⁶.

2. A number of texts from the *Tahafut* and the *Manahadj* also make Gauthier speak of *“un Averroès nouveau, qui fait profession de croire aux mystères, aux miracles, de subordonner la philosophie à la religion, l’évidence de la raison aux révélations de la prophétie”* ³⁷:

- *“All those who accept that a religion can exist that is based only on reason, must recognize that it is inferior to the religions that are derived from both reason and revelation”* ³⁸.
- *“When Algazali stated that one should turn to the divine law for everything that cannot be grasped with human reason, he was right. Because the science that comes forth from divine inspiration is only revealed to complement knowledge by reason. I mean that all that surpasses the span of reason, is taught to man by God Almighty through the revelation. Thus, the truths that remain inaccessible through reason, and for which knowledge is needed for life and the existence of man, are of two sorts: either absolutely inaccessible, that is, it does not belong to the nature of reason to reach them as reason, or inaccessible for the natural abilities of a category such as man”* ³⁹.
- *“One should say of religion that its principles are divine and that they surpass human understanding; and therefore, one should accept them, even if one is ignorant of the reasons” (Tahafut Alahafut).*

Furthermore Ibn Rushd also recognizes the existence of *miracles*. Contrary to Ibn Sina, he states that they cannot be the subject of rational discussions and explanations due to the fact that they belong to the principles of religion just like the existence of God itself. He who does this deserves to be

³⁶ *Tahafut Alahafut*, p. 583.

³⁷ O.c., p.126, cf. Badawi, p. 785.

³⁸ *Tahafut*, p. 584.

³⁹ *Tahafut Alahafut*, cited by Badawi, p. 186.

punished. Prophecies are also defended by Averroes as super-rational⁴⁰. Gauthier⁴¹ attempts to lessen the impact of these texts by connecting them with the theory of the Eastern *falasifa*, especially Alfarabi and Ibn Sina regarding prophecies, particularly the theory of *emanation* and the *Active Intellect*. He must admit however that one does not find this theory made explicit by Ibn Rushd, at least not systematically (cfr. also the fact that Ibn Sina explicitly wants to give a rational explanation for miracles, prophecies and the like, while Ibn Rushd rejects any discussion on the subject). Herman De Ley (o.c.) joins Badawi⁴² in his conclusion that “the texts mentioned by Ibn Rushd indicate a fideism that is emphasized with increasing strength.

What to think of the unmistakably subversive effect of Averroes in the Christian West? This should primarily be attributed to the *difference in structure* of Islamic religion compared to Christianity, including a completely different role of *theology*. In Christianity, religion and theology are one and the same, that is theology is the higher, perfect form of religion: it has the authority to place itself between philosophy and the interpretation of the texts from the Holy Scripture by defining *mysteries* that are impenetrable for reason. In a case of a conflict, reason has to retaliate for belief, philosophy for *theology*. Ibn Rushd’s fierce polemic against theologians – for which the Islamic religion granted him full rights⁴³ – must have come across as an attack on religion itself in Christian circles. Another aspect which is related to Averroes’s theory, is the distinction he makes⁴⁴ between the lower people, for whom miracles and prophecies are primarily intended, and the philosophical élite. For a Christian philosopher, on the other hand, the dogmas are the same for all people. By this all, Ibn Rushd of course does not become an “apologist of the Qur’an”, that is, a normal “theologian” (see further on). Bloch⁴⁵ who expresses himself disapprovingly of the fideic interpretation of Averroes (and Avicenna) calls it “*kleine Philologie der Lesarten, sondern der Legende*” -, referring to the “pantheistische Zug” with Averroes (who, however, through his “return to Aristotle” and the rejection

⁴⁰ In the *Manahadj*, pp.99, 100, 102 Müller.

⁴¹ O.c. p.138.

⁴² O.c. p. 788.

⁴³ Islam is above all, a *practical* religion based upon concrete acts (the five pillars) much more than a *doctrine* (super 18).

⁴⁴ Following Alkindi, Alfarabi and Ibn Sina.

⁴⁵ O.c. p. 492.

of the emanation theory had undergone some weakening). He is, according to Herman De Ley, completely mistaken however, when he points to the persecution of which Averroes became a victim and to “die deutlich subversive Wirkung des Averroismus im christlichen Mittelalter”, as arguments to prove Averroes’s rationalism and anti-orthodoxy (cfr. comparable cases of “incomprehension” by society, for example the condemnation of Thomas).

A final point that should be mentioned in this context concerns the “teachings of the double truth” which were attributed to Averroes and the “Averroïsts” during the Middle Ages. The categorization of people into three classes could indeed lead to the proposition that there is a different truth for philosophers than for the people. But Ibn Rushd states explicitly that “the truth cannot be contradictory to the truth”; in his opinion there is only one truth. *In case* there is a contradiction, the religious text must be interpreted. As Badawi⁴⁶ remarks, this seems to be diametrically opposed to the views of those in favor of the doctrine of the double truth, which was condemned in 1270 and 1277 at the University of Paris. They attempted to resolve the incompatibility between the conclusions of philosophy and the teachings of Christian belief by making a restriction: “even if this conclusion was reached”, they say, “according to the method of Aristotle and his Commentators (that is Ibn Rushd), still, belief and truth confirm something different. In other words, in case of a conflict and opposite to Ibn Rushd⁴⁷, the belief is correct. In the “Condemnation of 219 propositions”, proclaimed by the synod of 1277, the following is written about them:

*“Because they say these matters are true according to philosophy but not according to the Catholic belief, as if there were two opposing truths and as if the truth of the Holy Scripture is was contradicted by the truth in that which was said by cursed heathens”*⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ O.c. p. 782.

⁴⁷ Still one can also find such a remark from him (concerning the unity of the intellect): *per rationem concludo de necessitate, quod intellectus est unus numero, firmiter tamen teneo oppositum per fidem* (cited from Gilson, p. 360)

⁴⁸ Hyman-Walsh, p. 542.

In conclusion, for Averroes, there is a religious truth, which is the same for all people. The worst misfortune that people could have is to lose their faith in that truth. Philosophy shocks the belief of most people, and should therefore be kept for scholars (their method to reach the same *practical* conclusion as normal people, is based upon theoretical demonstration and speculative knowledge). But theology, with its unscientific and sophistic arguments, is, as it gives the *impression* that it follows the holy scriptures, much more dangerous still, especially because it has the intention of presenting that one, single authentic *doctrine* in which *everyone* must believe. In all cases where the rational methods of demonstration are not applicable, philosophers find themselves in the same position as the normal man: just like him they have to follow the literal meaning of the Qur'an and beware of untrue statements of theology.

2. Averroes's Need for an Enlighted Community

a) *Critics of Enlightenment*

While some commemorating conferences and Symposia Averroica between 1976 and 1996 were focusing on Averroes and the Enlightenment, it would be helpful to briefly examine with original scholars as Timothy J. Madigan some of the main criticisms of the Enlightenment project, and see how Averroes's philosophy might address these ⁴⁹. Critics of the Enlightenment such as the Frankfurt School scholars Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer have charged that its near-deification of human reason has totalitarian and repressive tendencies that are inimical to human freedom. There is an assumption - specially evident in Descartes' methodology - that all people reason alike and should arrive at the same conclusions. In their 1947 book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they write that, "The difficulties in the concept of reason caused by the fact that its subjects, the possessors of that very reason, contradict one another, are concealed by the apparent clarity of the judgements of the Western Enlightenment."⁵⁰ That is to say, the

⁴⁹ See Timothy J. Madigan, *Averroes and Inquiry: The Need for an Enlightened Community*, in Mourad Wahba and Aboussena Mona (ed.) *Averroës and the Enlightenment*, Prometheus Books, New York, 1996, p. 69-77

⁵⁰ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1991), p. 83.

Enlightenment thinkers had a difficult, if not impossible, task of dealing with the fact that individuals seem to understand the world in different ways, by using different methods.

One of the most vigorous critics of the Enlightenment's adherence to rationalism was Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). One area he dealt with particularly was the prevalence of religious belief. He scoffed at the Enlightenment notion that superstitions and false beliefs could be eradicated. We are metaphysical creatures by our very nature, doomed to ask unanswerable questions about the meaning of our existence. While a scant few may be able to overcome superstitions, the vast majority of humans take solace in their illusions - and it would be cruel to disabuse them of these, or encourage them to give them up. Rationalism is not a mode for the masses, who are unable to follow the dictates of truth tables or logical methodologies. This critique is best expressed in Schopenhauer's dialogue "On Religion." In it, two atheistic characters, Demopheles and Philalethes, debate the merits of ridiculing religious teachings. It is clear that Schopenhauer favors the views of Demopheles, who states that,

*Religion is the metaphysics of the masses; by all means let them keep it ... for mankind absolutely needs an interpretation of life; and this, again, must be suited to popular comprehension. Consequently, this interpretation is always an allegorical investiture of the truth.... Don't take offence at its unkempt, grotesque and apparently absurd form; for with your education and learning, you have no idea of the round about ways by which people in their crude state have to receive their knowledge of deep truths.*⁵¹

One sees here a sharp condemnation of the Cartesian dream of individuals following the exact same path to knowledge and arriving at a common belief system. Such a method could well lead to contempt for those who are unable or unwilling to use it. At first glance, the above passage seems to be similar to Averroes's views on the harmony of religion and philosophy. As Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh point out in their *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*,

Invoking Aristotelian logical principles, he divided the citizens into the rulers who can follow demonstrations, the masses who are persuaded by rhetorical

⁵¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms* (London: Penguin, 1970), p. 96.

*arguments, and, between them, the dialectical theologians who can understand dialectical discussions.... Averroes insisted that each of the three classes must be taught on its own level. General philosophical enlightenment, according to him, is proscribed.*⁵²

Is Averroes, then, a critic of the Enlightenment project's critique of superstitions and false beliefs? Certainly, like Schopenhauer, he valued the importance of symbolic and metaphoric language, and had a keen understanding of the ways in which people in general are motivated. But his presentation of this is far more nuanced than that of Schopenhauer. The irony of Schopenhauer's position is that it is he, and not the Enlightenment thinkers whom he castigates, who actually shows contempt for the masses. One cannot help but detect in the above-mentioned dialogue a sneering tone regarding the fools who cannot comprehend the world on rational principles. For all of his avowal of compassion, Schopenhauer seems to have little real regard for the majority of his fellow suffering creatures - at least of the human species. Horkheimer and Adorno are likewise guilty of the very sort of condescending attitude they criticize Enlightenment thinkers for having. For instance, in their discussion of what they call the "culture industry" - films, radio, television, magazines and other media that essentially sell the general public a false identity in order to keep them passive - they write that,

*As naturally as the ruled always took the morality imposed upon them more seriously than did the rulers themselves, the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are. Immovably, they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them. The misplaced love of the common people for the wrong which is done them is a greater force than the cunning of the authorities.... It calls for Mickey Rooney in preference to the tragic Garbo, for Donald Duck instead of Betty Boop.*⁵³

While it is unclear what tragic element Horkheimer and Adorno see in Betty Boop which would make her superior to Donald Duck, one can sense an attitude of superiority. Unlike the masses they critique, Horkheimer and

⁵² Arthur Hyman and James J. Walsh, *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1973), p. 285.

⁵³ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 133-34.

Adorno are not fooled by the system. Like Schopenhauer, they affect an air of detachment, an “above the battle” position which separates them fundamentally from the common herd. Indeed, Schopenhauer is often quite blunt in his estimation of the majority of human beings - “What the pathetic commonplace heads with which the world is crammed really lack are two closely related faculties: that of forming judgements and that of producing ideas of their own ... they are capable of only *subjective* interest. It is precisely this that makes card-playing the most appropriate amusement for them - card-playing for money.... To be sociable with them is to be degraded.”⁵⁴ He also adds that to expect most people to appreciate intellectual merit is like expecting a castrate to beget children.

It can be seen then that critics of the Enlightenment are themselves often prone to belittle the aspirations and intellects of the vast majority of human beings. On the one hand, we have an Enlightenment ideal of all people being encouraged to use rules and logical methodologies to lead their lives; on the other hand, we have an anti-Enlightenment, cynical view of most people being duped by their societies and a few intellectuals able to see the charade but unable to essentially change it. Neither of these scenarios (both of which are, of course, drastic oversimplifications) seem to fit the approach which Averroes himself advocated, for they each lack a sense of human beings attempting to learn the truth about their world by relying both on their own intellectual powers and by sharing information and freely discussing their points of view with others - in short, what is missing in these scenarios is the sense of a *community* of inquirers. This is an aspect which is perhaps best advocated by the American philosopher Charles Peirce (1839-1914). In his inspiring paper “Averroës and Inquiry ...” (o.c.) Madigan closes his presentation by briefly presenting Peirce’s views on the human practice of inquiry, and shows how these resonate with Averroes’s own discussion of the importance of philosophy.

b) A Strong Critic of the Cartesian Way

Like the Frankfurt School, Peirce was a strong critic of the Cartesian way of philosophizing. In his article “The Spirit of Cartesianism,” Peirce compared

⁵⁴ Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, pp. 127-29.

it unfavorably to the scholasticism it had sought to replace. He listed four key differences between these approaches:

1. Cartesianism teaches that philosophy must begin with universal doubt; scholasticism never questions fundamentals.
2. Cartesianism teaches that the ultimate test of certainty is to be found in individual consciousness; scholasticism rests on the testimony of sages and of the Catholic Church.
3. Cartesianism replaces the multiform argumentation of the Middle Ages with that of a thread of single inference.
4. While scholasticism has its mysteries of faith, it nonetheless undertakes to explain all created things, whereas Cartesianism ultimately relies upon facts that are themselves absolutely inexplicable.

While not advocating a return to scholasticism - which he recognized had relied far too heavily on the method of authority - Peirce nonetheless, called into question the supposed liberating element of Descartes's method of doubt. Doubts are not something that can be artificially generated. Rather, doubts cause us to question our previous habits of actions, or beliefs - they stop us in our tracks. Inquiry, then, is the struggle to attain beliefs. In order for inquiry to begin, there must be real and living doubts, which irritate us and which we struggle to free ourselves from. "Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts," he writes ⁵⁵. In addition, Peirce questioned whether individuals on their own could arrive at conclusions that would truly satisfy this quest. "We individually cannot reasonably hope to attain the ultimate philosophy which we pursue; we can only seek it, therefore, for the *community* of philosophers. ... Philosophy ought to imitate the successful sciences in its methods, so far as to proceed only from tangible premises which can be subjected to careful scrutiny, and to trust rather to the multitude and variety of its arguments than to the conclusiveness of any one." ⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Charles Peirce, "The Spirit of Cartesianism", *Collected Papers*, vols. 5-6, Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931-35), p. 157.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Peirce was also sensitive to the different ways in which people arrive at their beliefs, and the methods they use to preserve them in the face of doubts. Like Averroes, he held that there are three universal classes of believers:

*If we endeavor to form our conceptions upon history and life, we remark three classes of men. The first consists of those for whom the chief thing is the qualities of feelings. These men create art. The second consists of the practical men, who carry on the business of the world. They respect nothing but power, and respect power only so far as it is exercised. The third class consists of men to whom nothing seems great but reason.... For men of the first class, nature is a picture; for men of the second class, it is an opportunity; for men of the third class, it is a cosmos, so admirable, that to penetrate to its ways seems to them the only thing that makes life worth living. These are the men whom we see possessed by a passion to learn.*⁵⁷

Descartes's error was to assume that all people were or could be capable of joining the third class, with a disinterested desire for truth for truth's sake, seeking explanations, laws, and fundamental principles. An empirical examination of society ably demonstrates that this is simply not the case. The aesthetically minded believer tends to rely on feelings, intuitions, and instincts, and generally holds on tenaciously to previously accepted postulates. This type of person is easily moved by poetry and rhetoric. The practical person focuses on concrete, short-term situations, and is only interested in examining fundamental principles if there is (in William James's famous phrase) some "cash value" to doing so. Such people seek order and opportunity, and often rely upon the method of authority to fix their beliefs. Unlike the third class of believers, the first two both fear and abhor uncertainty and chance. The aesthete and the businessperson distrust the thoroughgoing fallibilism of the scientific attitude, and are unlikely to be moved by appeals to reason.

Yet Peirce was by no means sympathetic to Schopenhauerian elitism and resignation. He remarked that the school of Schopenhauer contained philodoxers almost as narrow-minded as Italian monks and Thomists, and rather uncharitably described Schopenhauer himself as having a "diseased mind." Schopenhauer's misanthropy itself impedes inquiry. For Peirce, a

⁵⁷ Peirce, "The Scientific Attitude", *Collected Papers*, vols. 1 and 2, p. 19.

community of inquirers involves people of all three classifications of belief interacting with each other, attempting to understand their differing perspectives and endeavoring to forge mutually satisfying structures. Each type is likely to see aspects of the whole situation that the others might miss (scientists, for instance, in their quest for facts, often overlook a question that business-oriented people would immediately raise - "what will this cost?"). Peirce, like his colleague James, calls for intellectuals to come down from their ivory towers and mingle with nonintellectuals, seriously listening to their concerns and sharing observations with each other. As Philip Weiner points out,

*Most important of all for understanding the man and the deep humanistic undercurrent of even his abstruse speculations and technical researches is Peirce's view of higher education. A college or university should be a community of scholars devoted to study and to enlarging the sphere of knowledge so that teaching may spread the desire to learn how things really are, instead of aiming at increasing the prospects of financial or social success for its graduates.*⁵⁸

Peirce forswore Schopenhauer's intellectual self-satisfaction and would have had little patience for the Frankfurt School's highly specialized terminology and cliquish posture. In a sense, Peirce is far more sensitive to individualism, and sympathizes with Descartes's respect for the untapped intellectual powers of all members of society.

In a recent discussion of the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Richard Rorty writes that, "Horkheimer and Adorno suspect that you cannot have a moral community in a disenchanting world because toleration leads to pragmatism.... They think that pragmatism was the inevitable outcome of Enlightenment rationalism and that pragmatism is not a strong enough philosophy to make moral community possible."⁵⁹ Interestingly enough, Peirce himself grew disenchanting with the ways in which some of his contemporaries - especially James - used the term "pragmatism," making it

⁵⁸ Philip P. Weiner, introduction to Charles S. Peirce, *Selected Writings* (New York: Dover, 1958), p. xvii.

⁵⁹ Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy", in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 177.

seem as if it referred primarily to the second class of believers (the practically oriented). He disavowed the word, preferring to call his own philosophy “pragmatism” - a word too ugly for anyone to kidnap. Philosophy, Peirce felt, needs to combine the aesthetic, practical, and scientific elements, not treat them as separate and distinct. A moral community is one in which all members respect each others capabilities and try as best as possible to work together in a common search for satisfying and enriching beliefs. Peirce’s pragmatism attempts to steer a course between the Scylla of romantic cynicism and the Charybdis of Enlightenment deification of reason. Yet, when all is said and done, his commitment to the quest for objective truth is deeply evident - a quest he urges all people to attempt, for their own good and for the good of society as a whole. For Peirce, the ultimate commandment is: Thou shalt not block the road of inquiry.

c) Averroes’s Sensitivity to the Different Avenues of Knowledge and Belief

Such a commandment is one which Averroes would equally espouse. Dominique Urvoy writes that,

*In contrast to the haughty isolation of the mystics and the advocates of illumination like Ibn Tufayl or Ibn Bajja’s “solitaries,” the process by which philosophy is carried out is, according to Ibn Rushd, the concern of humanity as a whole.... In short, the men of religion, like the philosophers before Ibn Rushd, failed to combine a personal perspective with a concern for the public good. Ibn Rushd’s approach was more balanced.*⁶⁰

Urvoy points out that Averroes was not a marginal figure in his own time, but rather was fully involved in the affairs of his community as a physician and jurist. Even more importantly, he was both willing and able to communicate with and learn from the Christian and Jewish communities and appreciate the wisdom of the ancient pagans. He had a respect for all inquirers, and made it clear that even the educated elite must be receptive to the wishes of the masses. Reason should be used to harmonize society rather than enslave it. The Law has provided a way to truth suitable to every

⁶⁰ Dominique Urvoy, *Ibn Rushd* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 110.

person's nature, and a good community is one where hatreds and misunderstandings are overridden by a shared love for the truth. "Indeed", he writes,

*God has already removed many of these ills, ignorant ideas and misleading practices, by means of this triumphant rule. By it He has opened a way to many benefits, especially to the class of persons who have trodden the path of study and sought to know the truth. This [he has done] by summoning the masses to a middle way of knowing God the Glorious, [a way] which is raised above the low level of the followers of authority but is below the turbulence of the theologians; and by drawing the attention of the elite to their obligation to make a thorough study of the principles of religion.*⁶¹

In a time of increasing culture clashes and renewed tenacity in belief-fixation, Averroes's espousal of collegiality is all the more relevant. He presents a method which avoids both Cartesian isolationism and Schopenhauerian contempt for the masses. The Enlightenment project, if it is to remain relevant to the present day, needs to be aware of Averroes's sensitivity to the different avenues of knowledge and belief.

3. Points of View and Variety of Paths

To understand Averroes's account of a variety of paths to the truth⁶² we have to grasp his theory of meaning. Unlike his philosophical predecessor (but curiously like his fellow-countryman, Maimonides) he places great weight on the notion of equivocation and ambiguity in our language. The relatively loose connection between the use of similar names permits him to discuss the difficulties involved in grasping what those names mean. Their meanings are different depending upon the context within which they are used, although they are not completely different and distinct. There is a thread of meaning connecting the different uses which extends from the divine exemplar to the temporal imitation. If we regard these terms as clear and univocal then we will get into the sorts of difficulties experienced by

⁶¹ Averroes, "The Decisive Treatise Determining the Nature of the Connection Between Religion and Philosophy", G.F. Hourani, trans., in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*.

⁶² Cfr. Leaman, *Averroes and his Philosophy*, p. 193 sq.

Avicenna in explaining how a simple deity could embody a multiplicity of attributes, and of how the essence of a thing is independent of its existence. There will also exist a fatal difficulty in differentiating between the levels of abstraction which obtain between the ordinary thinking subject and the active intellect and beyond. Averroes accepts with Aristotle that there can be no priority or posteriority within the same genus, and so is led to develop an account of meaning which is based upon the *pros hen* rather than the genus-species relation. This relation is extremely useful in characterizing some of the most important theses presented by Averroes.

What are these theses? One is the significance of the notion of a point of view. In Averroes's philosophy there is a continual contrast between different points of view. There is not just a distinction between God's point of view and the human point of view, but also a differentiation of the standpoints of a whole variety of different human beings based upon their forms of reasoning. In the *Fasl al-Maqâl*, for example, there is a distinction between demonstrative, dialectical, rhetorical, and sophistical people (*FM*, ch. 3 *passim*). All these people are using similar language to describe what is important to them, namely, their religion, God, happiness, the next life, moral behaviour, and so on. This language is not identical regardless of its usage, but nor is it completely equivocal. There exist links between different applications of the same name, and these links are sufficiently strong for it to make sense to say that these uses are of the same term. In that case we can talk about a variety of routes to the same destination, a variety of views based upon the same principles and beliefs, and a variety of life-styles which together add up to something morally and religiously desirable. Commentators on Averroes tend to restrict his use of the notion of consensus (*ijma'*) to its theological role in sunni Islam, and this is valid in so far as it goes. But agreement in society has a more powerful role even than that of establishing religious orthodoxy and the definition of belief and heresy. Agreement also establishes what words mean. For Averroes the criterion of ambiguity is entirely social. If a group of people within the community come to regard a scriptural passage as ambiguous, then it is ambiguous, and has to be resolved in some way if practice is not to suffer. If a passage is clear to everyone, then it is clear in itself, and there is no need to speculate what lies behind it or how it justifies what it claims. It is clear and provides a definite route along which salvation eventually lies. When one group of people is satisfied that it understands a text, and another group is worried by

something in it, it is incumbent upon the latter to satisfy the theoretical problems without challenging the beliefs and practices of the majority of society, since any widespread challenge to the normal understanding of key terms would make such terms useless. It is crucial to grasp here that he does not just mean useless as a guide to action. In the example comparing spiritual and physical health he suggests that, if the theologians broadcast their confused thoughts about the meaning of the Qur'an, ordinary believers would come to doubt that they have an adequate grasp of the meanings of the texts which they know. They may come to doubt that those texts have any meaning at all, in the same way that the patients of the dialectical doctors might come to think that there is no such thing as health and sickness.

But there is such a thing as health and sickness, and religious texts do convey important information about how people ought to behave. Averroes argues that, in addition to these significant facts of what he takes to be common-sense experience, we have to pay attention to the different ways in which different people relate to these facts. A doctor has a different view of disease than an ordinary unsophisticated patient, and an ordinary believer has a different view of the grounds of his belief than a philosopher. Rather like Aristotle, Averroes respects a whole gamut of different views on a common topic, refusing to select some as more privileged or accurate than others⁶³. This variety of views is represented by the variety of language available to characterize a whole continuum of views, ranging from the entirely demonstrative to the most poetic and expressive. In his work Averroes spends a good deal of effort in trying to disentangle this variety and order it along the grid of demonstrative argument and its less stringent but still rational and related argument forms. It follows that equivocation in language is not something to be rejected as such. This feature of language must be accepted because it is a feature of our lives as different people living in a community with a whole range of ends and interests in prospect.

Ghazali condemns the suggestion that equivocation is a feature of the relationship between our language describing God and our language describing the ordinary world. He sees this as an attack upon the notion of God as a powerful and all-encompassing individual. In his reply to Ghazali,

⁶³ See on this topic the very interesting 'Good Repute' by M. Burnyeat, *London Review of Books* (6 Nov. 1986), 11-12.

Averroes argues that equivocation is an inevitable aspect of our language, since that language has to describe a wide gamut of views using the same name. We must respect the different uses of the same word because they represent different points of view, different points of view of the same thing. It is an error to represent some uses as essentially more accurate than others. At one time it was popular for philosophers to argue that, when a physicist and an ordinary person talk about a table, they have in mind different objects. The physicist knows that a table is 'really' a collection of immaterial atoms, while ordinary people think of it as something solid and stable. Averroes would argue that, when we talk about and observe a table, we are looking at one thing from a variety of points of view which are equally valid. The physicist is right because the table does have an atomic structure, and the ordinary person is right because he can eat his dinner on it. Our language is flexible enough to capture this diversity of views. In his philosophical methodology Averroes tries to show how it is possible for one thing to be described in a variety of ways. The arguments which have subsequently arisen concerning his 'real' views fail to grasp the philosophical approach he has constructed. When he tries to reconcile apparently contradictory views his strategy is to argue that all these views are acceptable as different aspects of one thing. The Averroist movement provides a useful focus for this idea, the precise nature of the apparent conflict between reason and religion. In his tentative remarks on language Averroes suggests that this conflict comes down to a stress upon different aspects of one thing, namely, the way the world really is. This is an intriguing interpretation of a longstanding philosophical dilemma, and may well be, according to Leaman, Averroes's most important contribution to philosophy itself.

(Bibliography at end of next paper)