

# *Averroes and the Umma of Philosophers*

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## *Abstract*

Averroes enjoyed wide acclaim in cultural milieus other than his motherland. This fact is often acknowledged with regard to its amplitude but not to its root causes related to Averroes' posture as a philosopher. An enthusiast of Aristotle and secular science, Averroes defended perhaps more vigorously than any others his assumption that philosophy can and should be accomplished independent of religious creeds. The universalism implicit in this stance, involving the dismissal of all confessionalism or parochialism, paved the way for Averroes' cross-cultural afterlife while, at the same time, maintaining that philosophy is the genuine embodiment of Islamic law: uneducated Muslims are to their intellectual peers like diminished philosophers, much as Jews and Christians are like diminished Muslims. As such, all humans make up one community of inchoate-to-accomplished philosophers such as the religion of Islam has established for the whole of humankind.

Averroes played a unique role in connecting different cultures on the ethnic, religious and linguistic levels. Himself a champion of Arabic philosophy, his legacy was soon translated into all major languages of his time. In both Jewish and Christian contexts it met with extraordinary acclaim, despite the cultural distance separating those settings from the hotbed of Averroes' engagement with Hellenizing philosophy and the Islamic sciences. In the Latin West, he captured the stage of scholastic debates over truth and faith and, related to those, philosophers' denial of personal immortality as well as individual cognition. In Jewish milieus, his authority was championed by none other than Moses Maimonides (d. 1204), whom it eventually overshadowed, to be subsequently embraced by Levi ben Gershon or Gersonides (d. 1344) in his supercommentaries on Averroes' commentaries.<sup>1</sup> In this way, Jewish scholarship prepared the so-called second revelation of Averroes, whereby the Jewish and Latin strands conjoined in the work of Renaissance translators who rendered Averroes' writings—or indeed those writings which had not been translated already—from Hebrew into Latin, thus completing Averroes' transmission and canonization over the critical centuries leading from the middle ages through the modern era.<sup>2</sup>

Averroes' popularity in contexts other than that of origin surpassed that of many other Islamic thinkers, constituting almost a unicum on the scene of cross-cultural philosophy. This raises an obvious question about the factors which fostered his wide dissemination and sustained the tradition of Averroistic learning outside Islam, in the European capitals of higher education. A clue is offered by Averroes' own predilection for Aristotle as an archetype of pure rationality, as such foreign to the particular concerns of any given

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<sup>1</sup> S. Harvey, "Islamic Philosophy and Jewish Philosophy", in P. Adamson – R.C. Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 2005, pp. 349-69.

<sup>2</sup> H.A. Wolfson, "The Twice Revealed Averroes", *Speculum* 36.3 (1961), pp. 373-92.

society, and naturally appealing to intellectuals irrespective of individual circumstances on the political, social or religious levels. The evidence from Averroes' reception is further confirmation of such appeal, inasmuch as Averroes' own readers adopted a selective attitude in retaining what was more philosophically relevant and dismissing what was more culturally or Islamically connoted.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the available evidence calls for further investigation as to whether Averroes' type of engagement was itself grounded in the first place on a universalistic – or indeed cosmopolitan – understanding of intellectual life, making it as such relevant, and significant, to the wider compass of non-Islamic societies. So much is what the present study is going to discuss.

To this end, a preliminary distinction is in order. In and of itself, endorsing a universalistic view concerning the goals of intellectual life, or human life as a whole, is not incompatible with maintaining a non-universalistic stance on the principles grounding those goals and making them the goals that they are. In principle, one might make it one's mission to engage human society at large, and indeed overcome social or ethnic boundaries, while entertaining such goals on account of some particular, religious or other culture-specific, commitment. By the same token, cosmopolitanism is not per se opposite to a measure of cultural particularism, and the two come together in hybrid variants of various strands.

The hypothesis that shall be tested is that Averroes upheld a kind of hybrid or qualified cosmopolitanism. If “cosmopolitanism” is understood as the view that all humans are, regardless of particular affiliations, citizens in a single community,<sup>4</sup> Averroes subscribes to it as long as the community in question is specifically the Muslim community (*umma*). The hypothesis stands in need of verification, but is already suggested by various hints that punctuate Averroes' argument in relevant places of his writings. For example, speaking of various differences in the religions of his day Averroes submits that Islam alone is common to all humankind (*‘amma li-ġamī‘ al-nās*) on account of the universality of its doctrine (*‘umūm al-ta‘līm*).<sup>5</sup> This would imply both (i) that there is single community for humankind and (ii) that such a community is Islam. Likewise, in his commentary on Plato's *Republic*, Averroes discusses the natural law that is common to humans and turns them, as it were, into a single body. He remarks that the law of nature materializes in the law of Islam: answering the question of how the ideal city can arise, he submits that the ideal citizen should live by the law of nature in an age when philosophy is completed, and notes that this is the case in his own age and with the law of Islam.<sup>6</sup>

As will emerge in the course of the analysis, Averroes' qualified cosmopolitanism is predicated on a prior assumption construing all humans as either full-blown or, at least, inchoate philosophers for whom alone, in the end, the *umma* and its *ṣarī‘a* law care and provide. A philosophical seed is planted in all people, qualifying them naturally for citizenship in Islam as the religion of knowledge and reason. Therefore, everyone who stays true to their rational nature will thereby enact the Islamic calling. They will make up one body of seekers,

<sup>3</sup> D.N. Hasse, *Latin Averroes Translations of the First Half of the Thirteenth Century*, G. Olms, Hildesheim 2010.

<sup>4</sup> P. Kleingeld – E. Brown, “Cosmopolitanism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2019 Edition, E.N. Zalta (ed.), online (<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/cosmopolitanism/>>, 20 June 2024)

<sup>5</sup> Averroes, *Manāhiġ al-adilla fī ‘aqā’id al-milla*, ed. M. Qāsim, Maktabat al-Anġilū l-miṣriyya, Cairo 1964, p. 220.13-14. Eng. tr. in Averroes, *Faith and Reason in Islam: Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments*, tr. I.Y. Najjar, Oneworld, Oxford 2001, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> Averroes, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*, tr. R. Lerner, Cornell U.P., Ithaca NY 1974, p. 75.

seeking the truth with one heart and one mind. Such is the universality of Islam, taken as a call for all humans to live the intellectual life, and that informs Averroes' thought from its very foundations. It is from those foundations, therefore, that the inquiry must start.

### 1. Obstructing Confessionalism: The Theologians Dismissed

In the opening lines of his *Kaṣf 'an manābiḡ al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla* (*Exposition of the Methods of Proof concerning Religious Doctrines*) Averroes lays out his take on Scripture. He defines the Qur'ān as being in its entirety a call for study and investigation (*al-nazar wa-l-i'tibār*),<sup>7</sup> much the way that his fellow Andalusian Abū Bakr ibn Bāḡḡa (d. 1139) understood all religion to be in essence an incitement to knowledge (*al-ḥadd 'alā l-'ilm*).<sup>8</sup> Study is mandated by religious law (*ṣar'*) precisely as a means to acquire true knowledge and conduct (*ta'lim al-'ilm al-ḥaqq wa-l-'amal al-ḥaqq*),<sup>9</sup> that is, true knowledge of God, all beings, and supernal beatitude. On this account, the law of Islam is primarily a prescription for acquiring knowledge of all reality, from divine to lower beings (*sā'ir al-mawḡūdāt*), and is enjoined on all humans (*al-ḡamī'*) in proportion to their individual capacities, concrete possibilities, and social conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the universalism and intellectualism inherent in this view, humans' disparity in their propensity for intellectual labor is undeniable. In this connection, Averroes sets forth his threefold division of human types based on their attitudes toward the acquisition of knowledge. For some people, that means seeking unfettered rational evidence. For others, it means engaging such evidence only inasmuch as it does not deviate from received knowledge and traditional belief. For still others, it means acknowledging as much of it as may sound immediately persuasive, is packaged into familiar images taken from everyday life, and elicits no further scrutiny or critical examination. Drawing upon the vocabulary of Aristotelian logic, the first kind is described as comprising experts in demonstration, that is to say flawless argumentation meeting the highest standards for critical thinking. The second are practitioners of dogmatic theology, who engage in argumentation to the extent that it correlates, by validating and underpinning, to the established principles of religion; they resemble those ancients whom Aristotle brands as "dialecticians" as they engaged in disputation with the aim of defending previously established principles. Last in line are simple or common believers with no truck with either demonstration or dialectic: these are content with yielding to the enticement of persuasion as effected by religious leaders or state officials, and are accordingly associated with rhetoric, within the scholastic classification of the logical arts. They relate to poetics, taken as the art of imagery: not because they enjoy any particular skills at creating images, but because they are themselves fed by the images that have been created by the Lawgiver in adumbrating the lofty doctrines of revelation.

<sup>7</sup> Averr., *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, p. 149.10-11 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), p. 32.

<sup>8</sup> Avempace, *La conduite de l'isolé et deux autres épîtres*, ed. and tr. C. Genequand, Vrin, Paris 2010, p. 117.19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl, with Its Appendix (Damīma) and an Extract from Kitāb al-Kaṣf 'an manābij al-adilla*, ed. G.F. Hourani, Brill, Leiden 1959, p. 29.8-9; Eng. tr. in Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy: A Translation, with Introduction and Notes, of Ibn Rushd's Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl, with Its Appendix (Damīma) and an Extract from Kitāb al-kaṣf 'an manābij al-adilla* by G.F. Hourani, Gibb Memorial Trust, London 1967, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 30.6-14 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 64.

Having explained that religious knowledge is thus available to all men and women, Averroes clarifies in the *Faṣl al-maqāl* (*Decisive Treatise*) that this knowledge can be attained in different ways depending on the natural dispositions of its recipients (*ḡibillatuhu wa-ṭabī'atuhu*)<sup>11</sup>: that is, by means of demonstrative (*burhān*), dialectical (*aqāwīl ḡadaliyya*), or rhetorical arguments (*aqāwīl ḥiṭābiyya*). Divine law itself has envisaged these avenues for instruction (*min hādīhi l-turuq l-talāt*). Simple believers are those who, far from exploring the depths of revelation, lean to persuasion by sermons and admonitions (*maw'iza*), seeking to bridge the gap between the world of immanence and that of transcendence with the help of analogues (*amtāl*), similes (*ašbāh*), and metaphorical speech (*taḡawwuz*) constructed by imagination (*taḥayyul*) from everyday experience.<sup>12</sup> Working on images (*miṭāl*) rather than things themselves (*al-šay' nafsubu*), they accommodate to the teachings of revelation without subjecting them to any independent study from either a dialectical (*ḡadalī*) or demonstrative (*burhānī*) standpoint.<sup>13</sup>

Applying again the jargon of Arabic logic, Averroes defines the three categories of people based on the kinds of objects that their minds can entertain (*taṣawwur*)—whether the things themselves or mere images of them—and the kinds of assent (*taṣdīq*) that they can give to what is stated, whether demonstrative (*burhānī*), dialectical (*ḡadalī*), or rhetorical (*ḥiṭābī*): “Therefore, since it is the purpose of Scripture simply to teach everyone, Scripture has to contain every method of [bringing about] judgements of assent (*taṣdīq*) and every method of forming concepts (*taṣawwur*)”.<sup>14</sup> This tripartition constitutes the backbone of much of Averroes’ argument in the *Faṣl*. It is so often reiterated that it may be taken to be Averroes’ expressing some kind of law about the immutable structure of Muslim societies: as if the Muslim *umma* was meant, by some invariable metaphysical principle, to be so constituted as to comprise the three classes with their distinctive postures in religion. On closer scrutiny, however, this impression stands at odds with various evidence that is connected to the *Faṣl* itself. Some tension emerges as one realizes that practitioners of dialectic are identified with *mutakallimūn*: that is, scholars of Islamic theology (*kalām*) who apply dialectic in defending religious dogma. The association would prima facie legitimize them as sound believers, embracing one of the three eligible ways to uphold revelation. However, precisely qua practitioners of *kalām*, they turn out to be unfit for Islam, most notably in the *Kaṣf*. In the chapter dedicated to the Qur’ānic evidence for God’s unicity (*tawḥīd*),<sup>15</sup> Averroes traces the religious argument leading from the unicity of creation to that of the Creator. He contrasts it with that which was developed by theologians to the effect that God’s unicity is best established counterfactually: supposing that there existed more than one God, different and distinct in number, their differing wills would come to clash at some point, with only one prevailing, thus proving the others neither omnipotent nor, therefore, true gods. Leaving aside the merits of the argument, one problem that Averroes notes is that this argument is simply not what the Qur’ān teaches. On this count, theologians deviate from the doctrine of the Islamic revelation:

<sup>11</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 12.11 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, pp. 22.15–26.2 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), pp. 58–60.

<sup>13</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 30.6–14 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 64; Arabic in Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, pp. 30.15–31.3 Hourani.

<sup>15</sup> Averr., *Manāḥiḡ al-adilla*, pp. 155.1–156.2 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), pp. 39–40.

they are not compliant with Islam in the way that every Muslim ought to, that is, they are not effectively Muslims. They are only nominally so, insofar as they claim allegiance to Islam. Labelling them as “Muslims” will, therefore, make sense by sheer equivocation on the name of Muslims (*bi-štirāk al-ism*).<sup>16</sup> Clearly, if theologians are no genuine Muslims, neither can their existence arise from God’s will of good pleasure. It can only be allowed by His will of permission, much as the many aberrations that affect nature and infiltrate society. God’s original design in creation is thus dissociated by Averroes from its actual unfolding over the course of history. Only the latter, not the former, has led to theologians’ engulfing in dialectic, alongside honest believers who engage in the noble work of demonstration or abide by the humble logic of rhetoric and poetics.

Similar tension between the threefold structure of society and the two-tiered schema without theologians surfaces in the *Faṣl* itself. There Averroes flirts with the idea that the three classes which make up society can be turned into two. Scripture is offered to all kinds of people, indeed, the dialectically as much as the demonstratively and rhetorically minded. Yet, since the latter make up the large majority of believers, they obviously meet the predominant concern of Holy Writ, while minor hints are sprinkled by way of philosophical clues so as to engage the intellectual elite. Notably, the two groups representing the “majority” and the “elite” are associated with the formulaic pair of terms – *‘amma* and *ḥāṣṣa* – that designate simple believers and the demonstrative class, with no room left for other figures such as theologians or dialecticians.<sup>17</sup>

The same dichotomy eclipsing theologians, or dialecticians, recurs in the same treatise as Averroes discusses allegorical interpretation (*ta’wīl*). On this subject, the Muslim umma is said to be divided into two, not three, parties: on one side are those who are good and qualified for exploring allegorical meanings; on the other stand those who should abstain and ignore all elaborate exegesis. The latter are, predictably, simple believers unable to raise above the level of rhetoric. The former are the experts of demonstration. No one else is contemplated here, since “allegorical 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”.<sup>18</sup> No room is made for dialecticians or theologians: quite the opposite, theologians are expressly prohibited from engaging Scriptural interpretation qua conducive to error and danger (*ḥaṭar*). Their writings are singled out for censure and suppression.<sup>19</sup>

What is outlined in the *Faṣl* is subsequently fleshed out in the *Kašf*. Completed soon after the former (around 1179), the *Kašf* is designed to carry out on a different level the project

<sup>16</sup> Averr., *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, p. 159.14-16 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> “Now some of the methods of assent comprehend the majority of people, i.e. the occurrence of assent as a result of them [is comprehensive]: these are the rhetorical and the dialectical [methods]—and the rhetorical is more comprehensive than the dialectical. Another method is peculiar to a smaller number of people: this is the demonstrative. Therefore, since the primary purpose of Scripture is to take care of the majority (without neglecting to arouse the elite), the prevailing methods of expression in religion are the common methods by which the majority comes to form concepts and judgements” (tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* [above, n. 9], p. 64; Arabic in Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, pp. 30.15-31.3 Hourani).

<sup>18</sup> Tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 61; Arabic in Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 27.5-6 Hourani.

<sup>19</sup> Averroes, *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, pp. 26.18-29.2 Hourani; tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), pp. 61-2.

inaugurated in the *Faṣl*. There Averroes set out to establish the harmony of Islam and philosophy, which he then substantiated in the *Kaṣf*. So much we learn from Averroes' own words:

For this reason, we have felt compelled to determine the principles of religion in the present treatise; for those principles, once examined, turn out to be more consistent with philosophy than their interpretations. Likewise, the opinion holding that philosophy is at variance with religion is notoriously ignorant of both philosophy and religion; for this reason, we have also felt compelled to write a [separate] work, that is, the *Faṣl al-maqāl*.<sup>20</sup>

On this ground, the *Kaṣf* should be read as building up on the earlier *Faṣl*, that is, expanding upon the same premises laid down in the latter. So much is stated in another passage from the *Kaṣf*, where Averroes elucidates the connection between the two treatises and summarizes what constitutes, by his own account, the main upshot of the *Faṣl*:

In a separate treatise [i.e., *Faṣl al-maqāl*] we have already dealt with the harmony of philosophy and religion, indicating how religion commands the study of philosophy. We maintained there that religion consists of two parts: external (*ẓābir*) and interpreted (*mu'awwal*), and that the external part is incumbent on the masses (*ḡumbūr*), whereas the interpreted is incumbent on the learned (*'ulamā*). With respect to that part, it is the duty of the masses to take it at its face value, without attempting to interpret it. As for the learned, it is not permissible to divulge their interpretations to the public, as 'Alī [ibn Abī Ṭālib], God be pleased with him, said: 'Address people in a language that they understand; do you want God and his Messenger to lie?' Thus, I decided to inquire in this book [i.e., *Kaṣf 'an manāhiḡ*] into those external dogmas which religion intended the public to uphold, and to investigate in all this, to the degree to which my energy and capability permit, the intention of the lawgiver, God's prayer and peace be upon him.<sup>21</sup>

Striking, in this account, is the fact that the tripartite schema of the *Faṣl* is downright dismissed and is replaced by the dichotomy distinguishing the two classes of common believers (*ḡumbūr*) and the learned (*'ulamā*).<sup>22</sup> Even more striking, this dichotomy is presented as a doctrine already granted in the *Faṣl*, and is understood by Averroes as being entirely consistent with the tripartition which operates so much more visibly across the latter. Clearly, the two presentations, albeit differing in formulation, must be read as compatible and coexisting with one another, with the further implication that, if coexisting, they must operate on different levels of discourse. In fact, they appear to capture different aspects of Averroes' taxonomy: the tripartition in the *Faṣl* operates on a descriptive level, in that it describes the actual or historical divisions of the Muslim *umma*; whereas the bipartition featuring in the *Kaṣf* pertains to a prescriptive level: it portrays the *umma* as that ought to be like, were it to manifest the normative will of God unaffected by the corruption caused by theologians. That is why, of the three classes distinguished in the *Faṣl*, what the dichotomy expunges is, precisely, the class of dialectic.

<sup>20</sup> Averr., *Manāhiḡ al-adilla*, pp. 184.17-185.2 Qāsim; translation mine.

<sup>21</sup> Averr., *Manāhiḡ al-adilla*, pp. 132.12-133.7 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), pp. 16-17, slightly modified.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. also the contrast between *al-akṭar* or *al-ḡumbūr*, on one side, and *al-'ulamā' al-rāsibūna*, on the other, in Averroes, *Manāhiḡ al-adilla*, p. 178 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 65.

The point is made in Averroes' aforementioned discussion of God's unicity. As said, Averroes is disappointed in the arguments of theologians. In lamenting their faults, he resumes the distinction between common believers (*ġumbūr*) and the learned (*'ulamā*): while the former follow the letter of religious instruction (*adilla šar'iyya*), the latter employ natural reason (*adilla tabi'iyya*) for the mastery of demonstration (*burhān*).<sup>23</sup> The third class, obliterated in this schema, is again the class of theologians. Their status is merely negative: that is, although they might be taken to make up a respectable social body, on a par with the other two, what they are in reality, and in proper metaphysical terms, is mere degeneration from the constituency holding genuine faith. They subtract rather than add to the order of religion. Unable to reach the heights of demonstrative reasoning, they are of the same extraction as common believers,<sup>24</sup> whose healthy – if elementary – judgement they pervert through the obnoxious sophistication of inconclusive dialectic. In this way, the poison that they inject into society contaminates the good nourishment of both simple faith and demonstrative science, which are like healthy bread (*hubz al-burr*) and fresh water (*al-mā' al-bārid*) for every Muslim.<sup>25</sup> Such is the intended nutriment for their souls and minds, everything else being but deception and adulteration.

With theologians so excommunicated, the two remaining classes comprise simple believers who rely on Scripture and philosophers with proficiency in demonstration. Their business is obviously different: philosophy and religion hinge upon different epistemic attitudes, for logical inference and for Scriptural imagery, with its attendant appeal to emotions. Moreover, religion is parasitic on philosophy in ways that will be explained shortly, whereas philosophy is independent of religion. Its independence is best appreciated by comparison with hard sciences. What is true of present-day science applies as much to genuine philosophy, in Averroes' eyes: that is, philosophy as a field of inquiry founded on purely rational evidence and independent of religion. Averroes blames his Muslim predecessors, beginning with Avicenna, for misunderstanding the true task of philosophy: despite their façade packaging of it as a rational study, they fashion it after the model of religion and, what is worse, theology itself.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to Avicennism, philosophy is and must live as a self-standing discipline depending on nothing other than the careful application of its proper techniques and procedures. By themselves, these ensure an adequate grasp of reality, mundane and ultramundane alike. Rational techniques, properly applied, regulate the use of human reason towards its full deployment, and so human reason has nothing concealed or inaccessible before it. The highest principles of nature do not escape its domain. Denying that would be utter nonsense (*sermo irrationabilis*):<sup>27</sup> for the highest principles are transparent to reason

<sup>23</sup> Averr., *Manābiġ al-adilla*, pp. 156.3-157.17 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Averr., *Manābiġ al-adilla*, p. 162.3-4 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), p. 47 (those who practice dialectics, *ġadal*, are none other than the *ġumbūr*); cf. *ibid.*, p. 52: "By the ordinary people here, I mean all those who do not devote themselves to the demonstrative arts, whether they be those who have succeeded in acquiring the art of theology or not"; Arabic in Averr., *Manābiġ al-adilla*, pp. 167.9-12 Qāsim.

<sup>25</sup> For the images of bread and water, see respectively Averroes, *Manābiġ al-adilla*, p. 179.12 Qāsim (66) and *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 12.1 Hourani (49).

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. *Manābiġ al-adilla*, p. 146.1-10 Qāsim (29); cf. also Averroes, *Tafsīr Mā ba'd at-Ṭabi'at*, ed. M. Bouyges, vol. 1, bk. 2, Dar el-Machreq, Bēirut (1938) 1991<sup>4</sup> (Bibliotheca arabica scholasticorum), p. 47.5-13, for Avicenna's flirting with aš'arite theology (*mubāšaratuhu 'ilm al-Aš'ariyya*).

<sup>27</sup> Aristotelis *Opera Omnia cum Averrois Cordubensis Commentariis*, apud Junctas, Venetiis 1550-1553 (Minerva, Frankfurt a. M. 1962), vol. IV, f. 66r A.

insofar as they are exempt from matter which is the hindering factor to human intellection. Had nature produced such intelligibles with no intellect capable of intellection, its work would be pointless, and this runs against the evidence of inherent natural finalism. True, Aristotle claimed human intellects to be blind to the highest principles much as bats' eyes are to daylight; but this cannot mean universal blindness for humans, on Averroes' mind, just as it does not mean universal blindness for animals themselves.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, in the same way as not every animal is able to perceive daylight through eyesight (bats being the case in point), likewise not every human can attain full knowledge of the principles through intellectual endeavor.<sup>29</sup> However, whenever this ascent is accomplished, the ascending mind can reach the summit of knowledge, a state of being that is as wondrous as it is humanly viable. In fact, that state is first realized, from all eternity, by the supernal intelligences assisting God in sustaining the cosmos and the perpetual cycle of life. Most notably, it is realized by the cosmic intelligence that is known as "Agent Intellect". On these grounds, humans are capable of appropriating the same state of the Agent Intellect, and can assimilate to or, in philosophical jargon, "conjoin" with it.

Here Averroes weighs in on a thorny philosophical debate over how and whether such conjoining (*ittiṣāl*) is open to humans. Not only does he assert that conjunction is possible, taking issue with the later al-Fārābī who deemed it utopia.<sup>30</sup> He went farther still in adumbrating – a fact often unnoticed – that conjoining with the Agent Intellect results in conjoining with other cosmic intelligences higher than it, including the highest of them which is God himself. After all, the Agent Intellect is by essence a perpetual reflection, or contemplation, of God the Highest. Consequently, once the Agent Intellect is seized and, as it were, cracked by human knowers, what becomes disclosed to them must be the divine essence which it mirrors and represents. Aristotle had already noted that humans should work to attain God's heights, although they succeed only for a short time.<sup>31</sup> In reference to his words, Averroes adds that conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with the Agent Intellect means in the end conjunction with God, and that connecting with Him occurs in much the same way as heavens do.<sup>32</sup> To be sure, the transition from lower conjunction with the Agent Intellect to higher conjunction with God himself is quite obvious to Averroes. On occasion, in defending the former he almost seamlessly slides into the latter, thus bursting into a prayer that, by means of philosophy (leading up to the Agent Intellect), philosophers may get to contemplate the face of God Himself.<sup>33</sup>

Averroes' contention must be appreciated against the backdrop of Islamic debates over means of spiritual elevation and the need for clerical intermediacy. While philosophers

<sup>28</sup> Averr., *Tafsīr Mā ba'd at-Ṭabī'at*, p. 8.6-13 Bouyges.

<sup>29</sup> Thus Averroes in his *Maqāla fī Ittiṣāl al-'aql al-mufāriq bi-l-insān*, as well as his *Maqāla ṭāniya* on the same subject; see respectively Averroès, *La béatitude de l'âme*, ed. and tr. M. Geoffroy – C. Steel, Vrin, Paris 2001 (Sic et Non), pp. 212-18 and 228.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Averroes (Ibn Rushd) of Cordoba, Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, tr. R.C. Taylor – Th.-A. Druart, Yale U.P., New Haven 2009, p. 399; Latin text in Averroes, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*, rec. F.St. Crawford, The Mediaeval Academy of America, Cambridge MA, 1953, p. 485.26-30.

<sup>31</sup> Arist., *Nic. Eth.*, 1177 b 30-35; 1178 a 5-8; *Metaph.* 1072 b 14-15; 1072 b 23-24.

<sup>32</sup> Averroès, *Tafsīr Mā ba'd at-Ṭabī'at*, p. 1612.8-1613.4 Bouyges; Eng. tr. Ch. Genequand, *Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics: A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics, Book Lām*, Brill, Leiden 1984, p. 157.

<sup>33</sup> Averroès, *La béatitude de l'âme*, p. 228 Geoffroy–Steel, *in fine*.



had concentrated upon conjunction with the Agent Intellect as a principle of Aristotelian epistemology, Islamic scholarship had been discussing a different and, indeed, higher kind of union (*ittiḥād*) with the God of Islam. About a century before Averroes, the debate had been catalyzed by claims from šī'ite theology, especially of the Bāṭinī strand, to the effect that elevating to the cosmic Reason was possible especially to the Imams and their emissaries. In response to them, al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) had advanced the agenda of Sufi exotericism, contending that complete union with the divine should be effected through spiritual asceticism and the attainment of the mystical states proper to prophets. Sufi masters and their acolytes, instead of Imams or their spokesmen, were to ensure the propagation of prophecy and its perpetuation, in Ghazālīan terms. Against this intellectual background, Averroes stands out visibly in rejecting the theologies of both Bāṭinism and Ghazālīan Aṣ'arism, and he affirms that neither Sufis nor Imams are genuine heirs to the prophets, but philosophers alone on account of their mastery of demonstration (*warāṭat al-anbiyā' bi-wasāṭat al-barāhīn*).<sup>34</sup>

This latter claim is quite relevant to Averroes' understanding of philosophy vis-à-vis religion. If, on account of demonstrative science, philosophers enjoy perfect knowledge of all things and so revive the office of prophets, whatever pertains to prophecy must lie within their remit and reach. Thus, the pillars of religion, including the existence of God, prophecy, and the afterlife, can be attained by independent reason, and nothing essential to the Islamic creed escapes the latter's control. Philosophy will adjudicate virtually all cases where the letter of revelation departs from its deeper meaning, establishing in each instance what it is that religion aims to either state or suggest. Such is the gist of Averroes' canon of Scriptural interpretation (*qānūn al-ta'wīl*), laid out in the ending section of the *Kašf*. Here Averroes identifies several instances of ambiguity contained in Holy Writ, and makes it clear that philosophers alone can resolve the obscure cases, where interpretation "is only known through lengthy and complex syllogisms that are learnt over a long period of time and through various arts and are not understood except by people of superior natures".<sup>35</sup> Another eloquent pronouncement on the subject is found in the *Faṣl*, where one comes across a famous image likening rational inquiry, to wit the study of logic, to the tools used in religious rituals, such as knives for ritual slaughtering (*tadkiya*): "when a valid sacrifice is performed with a certain instrument, no account is taken, in judging the validity of the sacrifice (*ṣiḥḥat al-tadkiya*), of whether the instrument belongs to one who shares our religion or to one who does not, so long as it fulfils the conditions for validity (*ṣurūṭ al-ṣiḥḥa*)".<sup>36</sup>

As the allegory indicates, the soundness of rational inquiry is never affected by the circumstances of its production. Its construction is independent of non-scientific commitments such as creedal or theological. Indeed, the more independent, the truer it is to what makes its essence and mission. That is also why pagan philosophers, the champions of rationality without religion, are pioneers in the venture of philosophy. As such, they must be acknowledged and embraced in the one community, as if one body, of all researchers. Their achievements are beneficial to all members of this body, including their Muslim fellows, and hence they deserve both gratitude and recognition: "The Ancients (*al-quḍamā'*) are like fathers for the Moderns (*al-muḥḍatīna*) except that their generation is of a more distinguished

<sup>34</sup> Averr., *Manāḥiḡ al-adilla*, p. 163.14-15 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), pp. 48-9.

<sup>35</sup> Averr., *Manāḥiḡ al-adilla*, p. 248.13-15 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), p. 128.

<sup>36</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 9.1-3 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 47.

kind than that of fathers, because fathers generate our bodies whereas scholars generate our souls. Therefore, our gratitude to them is greater than gratitude to fathers, filial piety is more imperative, love stronger, emulation more suitable”.<sup>37</sup>

With these words, Averroes’ universalism grants pagan as well as secular-minded thinkers full citizenship in the city of philosophers. But the allegory has more to tell. Pagan philosophers of antiquity are not citizens of some undefined philosophical city: they are de facto citizens of the Muslim umma. Just as knives are essential to the rites of religion, so is philosophy to the worship of Islam. This worship plays out as a quest for truth about God and His creation, and hence as a rational investigation of the whole of reality (*al-nazar bi-l-‘aql fī l-mawğūdāt*): “The Creator cannot receive more noble worship than the apprehension of His creatures, leading to authentic apprehension of [God] Himself (*ma‘rifat dātihī*)”.<sup>38</sup> Such is “the most noble of cults” (*‘ibāda ašraf*) and “the highest of services” (*ašraf al-‘amal*). For this reason, Holy Writ calls (*nadaba ilā*) or indeed enjoins (*awğaba*) every Muslim to pursue the study of beings (*i‘tibār al-mawğūdāt*) fulfilling divine will and epitomizing religious law.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the study of beings (*al-nazar fī l-mawğūdāt*) is the end of philosophy from its earliest blossoming in antiquity, with the result that “the aim and purpose in [the Ancients’] books is just the purpose to which the Law has urged us (*mağzāhum fī kutubihim wa-maqsiduhum huwa l-maqsid alladī ḥattanā l-šar‘ alayhi*), and whoever forbids the study of them to anyone who is fit to study them ... is blocking people from the door by which the Law summons them to knowledge of God, the door of theoretical study which leads to the truest knowledge of Him (*bāb al-nazar al-mu‘addī ilā ma‘rifatihī ḥaqq al-ma‘rifa*)”.<sup>40</sup>

Since philosophy is in essence the enactment of religious law (*al-šarī‘a al-ḥāšša bi-l-ḥukamā*), even philosophers who are not professed Muslims are no less effectively so.<sup>41</sup> They are the reverse of Islamic theologians who, albeit nominally Islamic, are actual renegades of Islam. Now that theologians’ apostasy has left the umma with the two parties of philosophers and common believers, we come to see that even this distinction becomes increasingly blurred as it is scanned more closely. Just as the three classes distinguished in the *Faṣl* have ushered in the two recognized in the *Kašf*, likewise the two remaining will merge into one by reason of their essential, if unapparent, unity.

## 2. Unfettered Philosophy

To begin with, what is specific to common believers is their relying on images (*miṭāl*), analogues (*amtāl*), and similes (*ašbāh*) of the esoteric teachings adumbrated in revelation. Believers are instructed to think of God as light, for example, not because God is literally so, but because light conveys the higher truth that He is pure spirit.<sup>42</sup> One may wonder to what

<sup>37</sup> Averr., *Tafsīr Mā ba‘d at-Ṭabi‘at*, pp. 9.8-10.2 Bouyges; translation mine. Cf. al-Kindī, *First Philosophy*, p. 102.1-9 Abu Rida, elaborating upon Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* A, 993 b 11-16.

<sup>38</sup> Averr., *Tafsīr Mā ba‘d at-Ṭabi‘at*, p. 10.12-13 Bouyges; translation mine.

<sup>39</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, pp. 5.10-6.18 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), pp. 44-5; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 11.4-12.7 Hourani (48).

<sup>40</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 11.4-10 Hourani (48).

<sup>41</sup> For Averroes’ notion of *al-šarī‘a al-ḥāšša bi-l-ḥukamā*, see R.C. Taylor, “Averroes on the *Sharī‘ah* of the Philosophers”, in R.C. Taylor – I.A. Omar (eds.), *The Judeo-Christian-Islamic Heritage: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, Marquette U.P., Milwaukee WI 2012, pp. 283-304.

<sup>42</sup> Averr., *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, p. 174 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), p. 61.

extent such images do succeed in conveying the doctrines that they are supposed to express. Regardless, the language of imaging to which Averroes clings is obviously designed to suggest that the letter of Scripture is neither independent nor self-reliant. Every image is the image of something other than itself. Its status qua image just simply cannot be understood without reference to the reality for which it stands. Its semantics is heteronomous. At the same time, that semantics is controlled by philosophers, who alone can determine the exact teachings symbolized in revelation. “If you examine Scripture carefully, you will find that even though it has illustrated these matters to the common people by representations without which they could not have understood them, it has alerted the learned to the real meaning of these matters, of which it gave such representations to the common people”.<sup>43</sup> “So we affirm definitely that whenever the conclusion of a demonstration is in conflict with the apparent meaning of Scripture, that apparent meaning admits of allegorical interpretation according to the rules for such interpretation in Arabic”.<sup>44</sup> If the meaning of Scripture is by essence determined by the teachings of philosophy, philosophy will necessarily agree with all truths behind religious imagery. As Averroes states, “demonstrative study does not lead to [conclusions] conflicting with what Scripture has given us; for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it”.<sup>45</sup> By virtue of this accord, “philosophy is the friend and milksister of religion ... which are companions by nature and lovers by essence and instinct”.<sup>46</sup> If so, the teachings of philosophy neither do nor can depart from those of religion. In this sense, the two coalesce, as it were: religious faith, qua fully explicated, is one with philosophical doctrine; conversely, philosophical doctrine is the same doctrine of faith, qua accompanied by demonstration (*al-īmān alladī yakūnu min qibal al-burbān*).<sup>47</sup>

Of course, reference to demonstration is crucial in that demonstration is what is supposed to differentiate between philosophy, as apodictic knowledge, and religion, as non-apodictic. Such is, at least, the impression that one can derive from the *Faṣl*, with its recurrent contrast of philosophical demonstrations and the non-demonstrative imagery of believers. Here, however, the *Faṣl* needs reading in conjunction with its twin: in the *Kaṣf*, Averroes specifies that, of all believers who rely upon images, only a few would stop at those. In addition to images, Scripture presents several rational arguments that are simple and elementary, as if mere outlines of the elaborate demonstrations usual among philosophers. Now, these arguments are not mere images for hortatory or homiletic speech. They are well-formed logical inferences (*adilla ‘aqliyya*), differing from demonstrations not as much in flow or construction, but in complexity and analyticity. On the issue of God’s existence, for example, common believers hold that everything made points to its Maker, and so creation points to a Creator. Here philosophers would add their understanding of how specifically the world was made, what is

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<sup>43</sup> Averr., *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, pp. 190.20-191.1 Qāsim (76-77). The contrast of images (*amṭāl*), constituting the exoteric meaning (*zāhir*) of revelation, and philosophy (*burbān*), constituting its esoteric doctrine (*bāṭin*) is recurrent throughout the *Faṣl*; cf. e.g. Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, pp. 22-3 *passim*; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 51; Arabic in *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 14.8-10 Hourani. Hence, Averroes’ rule of thumb that, whenever the apparent meaning of revelation differs from the evidence from philosophy, the former should be interpreted in accord with the dictates of reason.

<sup>45</sup> Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 50 (13.10-12 Hourani).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70 (39.13-16 Hourani).

<sup>47</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 17.11 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 54.

entailed by its immanent wisdom, in what ways God can be said to be its Cause or Maker.<sup>48</sup> As such, philosophical understanding is indeed superior in detail (*tafṣīl*) and depth (*ta‘ammūq*).<sup>49</sup> But it is not different in substance or content from the religious instruction that is imparted to every Muslim. Essentially identical arguments are laid out for everyone, in Scripture, through premises that are fewer in number and closer to self-evident (*al-qalīlat al-muqaddimāt allatī natā’iḡuhā qarība min al-muqaddimāt al-ma‘rūfa bi-nafsihā*), whereas they are fleshed out by philosophers through lengthy and complex syllogisms resting upon numerous principles (*al-maqāyīs al-murakkaba al-ṭawīla allatī tanbanī ‘alā uṣūl mutafannina*).<sup>50</sup> That is why the arguments that are found in Scripture are relatively rudimentary (*basīṭ*) compared to those spelled out in philosophy. But they are nonetheless certain (*yaqīnī*) and conclusive (*qat‘ī*)<sup>51</sup>: in this sense, they are no less demonstrative either, with the result that all distinction between demonstrative, reserved for philosopher, and non-demonstrative, intended for everyone, almost thins out to the point of collapsing. An obvious question may arise here as to whether Averroes is actually capable of unifying philosophical argumentation with religious teaching as successfully as he presumes. But that is a different question, obviously distinct from what is of relevance here: that is, Averroes’ claim that, however construed, such unity must be assumed to be as real as is the identity in essence of religion and philosophy. As a matter of fact, Averroes meant to devote his *Kaṣf* precisely to establishing this essential identity and as a way to safeguard the unity of Islam across different, social and professional, groups.<sup>52</sup>

At this point, it is no longer possible to oppose philosophers and common believers in the rigid way that one might superficially assume. The doctrine that they profess, the truth that they pursue, are not at all different; by the same token, the inferential paths (*turuq*) which the two follow turn out to be assumedly identical in outcome as much as in rough structure. If the two paths differ, as they do, it is merely by way of shades over the spectrum of precision and articulation with which revelation is spelled out, with philosophers explaining in full measure what believers grasp in broad outline. As much is enough to do away with the idea of a stiff separation between classes. But there is also further evidence that the distinction needs to be so nuanced. For it is not only common believers who are elevated to the level of near-philosophers. Philosophers themselves display unequal levels of proficiency within their class, in that conjunction with the Agent Intellect is as far removed from them as is the end of an ascensional process unfolding through progressive stages, from lowest to highest. In his literal commentary on Aristotle’s *On the Soul*, Averroes clarifies that conjunction comes about when intelligible forms get to reside in the mind of the conjoined knower. Now, this conjunction is realized in degrees such that “when all the theoretical intelligibles exist in us in potency, [the Agent Intellect] will be united with us in potency. When all the theoretical intelligibles exist in us in act, it will then be united with us in act. And when certain [theoretical

<sup>48</sup> Averr., *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, pp. 134-5 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), pp. 18-9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153.20, 154.6 Qāsim (37-38).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.9-10 Qāsim (79); cf. *ibid.*, p. 148.18-22 Qāsim (31): “When the religious methods are investigated carefully, they are found to include, at most, two characteristics: certainty (*an takūna yaqīniyya*) and simplicity rather than complexity (*an takūna basīṭa ḡayr murakkaba*), I mean, having few premises, whereby their conclusions are close to their first premises”.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 195.11-12 Qāsim (80): “That this sort of proof is both conclusive (*qat‘ī*) and simple (*basīṭ*) is clear from what we have just said”.

<sup>52</sup> Averr., *Kitāb Faṣl al-maqāl*, p. 39 Hourani; Eng. tr. Hourani in Averroes, *On the Harmony* (above, n. 9), p. 70.

intelligibles] exist in potency and certain in act, then it will be united in one part and not in another (*erit ipse copulatus secundum partem et secundum partem non*).<sup>53</sup> Therefore, if the goal of philosophers is conjunction, and if conjunction occurs as a process, the practice of philosophy and philosophers' performance itself must, likewise, come about piecemeal. On this picture, philosophers include not only scholars in a state of completed conjunction but also, quite obviously, everyone who is en route, at one stage or another, towards full-grown intellectual blossoming. Such gradualism, as inherent in the practice of philosophy, clearly matches the gradualism which holds for common believers: they, too, have a share, proportionate to their capacities, in the continuum of demonstrative discourse explicating perfect truth. To be sure, philosophers have recourse to a supply of sources and abilities which set them apart from people of lower intellectual engagement. But even this kind of distinction can be removed by means of qualified training, leading to increasingly higher levels of engagement in rational study, from elementary religious schooling to full-blown philosophy. That is the trajectory that is laid out for citizens of the ideal city, as Averroes reads throughout Plato's *Republic* and his imposing educational program.

Acquainted from religion with the rudiments of demonstration, Muslim believers are in and of themselves, as it were, inchoate philosophers. As such, they are ideally placed to develop further into mature scholars. With Averroes' "elimination" of theologians, what remains of Muslim population is the two classes of accomplished philosophers and of those who are inchoately so. Their common home is a umma of both virtual and actual philosophers, placed on varying levels of self-realization, and encompassing also thinkers who work(ed) outside traditional religions and, indeed, within a pagan milieu. The Muslim umma, qua Muslim, embraces philosophers qua philosophers.

### 3. *Towards Universalism: One Umma of Philosophers*

Now, what about non-Muslims who are not philosophers either? What is of those people living outside philosophy as well as outside Islam? They certainly act as believers in different religions, being neither rooted in Islam nor, consequently, routed towards philosophy. How far does Averroes' inclusivism reach in such cases, how much universal is it still in such instances? In tackling this issue, Averroes makes it clear that both Judaism and Christianity contain elements of Islam, as if seeds of one universal Word: that Word has never ceased, if partially, to inspire prophets in all religions (*lam tazal al-hikma amr mawğud fi abl al-wahy wa-hum al-anbiyā*).<sup>54</sup> In this sense, Jews and Christians can be viewed as inchoate Muslims, much as Muslims are inchoate philosophers. They participate in the one light of truth through whatever share of the Islamic revelation is sprinkled in their native traditions. Through that share, as accessible to them, they are not altogether severed from philosophical wisdom. Averroes could obviously draw on the traditional view of Islam as the seal of all previous prophecy and bringing it to completion: "There are in some religions certain [books] that deserve to be called the speech of God, due to their strangeness and their departure from human modes of discourse, by virtue of what they contain of knowledge and action ... You

<sup>53</sup> Averr., *Comm. mag. In De An.*, p. 500.11-17 Crawford.

<sup>54</sup> Averroès, *Tabafot at-Tabafot*, ed. M. Bouyges, Impimerie catholique, Beirut 1930, p. 583.12-13; Eng. tr. in *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, tr. S. Van Den Bergh, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge (1954) 1987, pp. 360-1.

will understand this quite well, if you have perused the Old Testament and the Gospels. It is impossible for them to have all changed ... That is why it was said regarding this religion, that it is the seal of all religions".<sup>55</sup> At the same time, religions other than Islam are less performative in that which is most specific to all religion just as such, that is, the ability to communicate superior (philosophical) knowledge. The nourishment that is provided in those traditions was good for their peoples in the ages of their own revelations.<sup>56</sup> In the course of history, however, more powerful cults have been established, whence the Prophet's saying as reported by Averroes: "Had Moses lived in my time, he could not but follow me".<sup>57</sup> The religion of Islam has surpassed all others by means of its efficacy in fostering virtue, for example, through its prescriptions for prayer or representations of the afterlife. Not to mention that the other religions contain a number of plain errors, such as the tritheism of Christians which denies God's unicity.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion: *Almohad Roots of Averroes' Universalism*

The foregoing analysis has called attention to what might be styled a reductionist thread running throughout Averroes' religious and political thought. In its outward constitution, human society appears to comprise different classes of citizens, each with its distinctive posture in religion. On closer examination, however, those classes can either be effectively dismissed, and in this sense eliminated (i.e., theologians), or they can reduce to a single class of philosophers, whether in embryo or in full bloom, with regard to the intellectual operation in which they all share. This operation is their intellectual understanding of the one truth unfolded by self-conscious scholars and glimpsed by common believers. The latter act as a sort of diminished philosophers, much as non-Muslim believers act as diminished Muslims, enjoying a limited, yet real, share in the revelation of Islam. Differences in intellectual standing across different human types cannot be denied, for sure. Still, those differences reflect various degrees in the realization of a single and common nature, and do not, as such, affect the essence of humans as rational seekers of the same wisdom, be they Muslims, Jews, Christians, or even pagans like ancient philosophers.

All such seekers make up a single body of citizens, ideally living as inhabitants of a single city. Ancient cosmopolitans would name them citizens of the world. By Averroes' time, much of this ideal had witnessed its realization in a real city with a written constitution, mandating intellectual labor for all of its dwellers. That was the Muslim umma, with its *šarīʿa* law enjoining rational reflection upon creation and the Creator. Its fulfillment was the historical religion of Islam qua submission the truth itself by means of intellectual worship. Its injunction would be followed, either formally or effectively, by professed as much as anonymous Muslims. Either way, whenever a man or women, whatever their circumstances,

<sup>55</sup> Tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), p. 103; Arabic in *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, p. 220.1-11 Qāsim.

<sup>56</sup> "Just as there are some foods that suit all people (or at least most of them), the same is true of religions. It is for this reason that all religions which have preceded ours were intended specifically for one people rather than another, whereas our religion was intended for all mankind" (*ibid.*, p. 104; Arabic in *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, pp. 220.16-221.2 Qāsim).

<sup>57</sup> Tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), p. 103; Arabic in *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, p. 220.11-12 Qāsim.

<sup>58</sup> Averr., *Manābiḡ al-adilla*, pp. 166.1-6, 244.5-15 Qāsim; Eng. tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* (above, n. 5), pp. 51-2, 125.

would engage in the pursuit of knowledge and practice of philosophy as best they could, he or she was inherently a Muslim, if not in name, at least in deeds. On these premises, Averroes claims that Islam is common to all mankind:<sup>59</sup> not merely because it is designed to be a religion for all mankind, but because it already constitutes the implicit faith embraced by everyone who genuinely cares for the truth and hence lives out the calling of the Qurʾān.

At the same time, the connection just described between cosmopolitan universalism, on one side, and Islamic particularism, on the other, is not peculiar to Averroes. It was preeminent in the historical age and milieu in which Averroes lived. That was the Islam of the Almohads, the charismatic movement that conquered the Maghreb when Averroes was in his early twenties. Throughout North Africa and the Iberian peninsula, Almohadism championed political universalism by emphasizing the unity of associate life on account of the inborn nature that is common to humans. At the same time, such inborn nature, which included innate knowledge of God, was understood in accord with the Islamic concept of *fiṭra*. That is the innate knowledge of Islam with which every person is born, before he or she is turned into an adult Muslim or other believer under societal pressure. At the hands of Almohads, similar ideology served the purpose of presenting Islam as being, simultaneously, the one religion designed for all mankind and the universal evidence afforded by natural reason. In the same vein, the Almohad founder, Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130), declared human reason as the royal road to religion (*ammā l-tawḥīd fa-inna ṭarīquhu l-ʿaql*) and, conversely, religion as the offshoot of intellectual knowledge (*al-ʿilm bi-l-ṭalab*).<sup>60</sup> Thus, despite all circumstances and divisions, there was a single home available for all rational creatures true to their calling, and that home was Almohad Islam. Such was, for Almohad Averroes, the natural bond of all humans qua citizens of a single umma. Thanks to Averroes' prodigious work and afterlife across Muslim, Jewish, and Christian Europe, these self-styled "Unitarians" (*al-Muwaḥḥidūn*) best known as the "Almohads" came to achieve in some way what they aimed to realize: the restoration of religious unity (*tawḥīd*) across cultural boundaries, through the universal worship of God in the form of unbounded philosophical learning.

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<sup>59</sup> "Because of the universality of the teaching of the Precious Book and the universality of the laws contained in it – by which I mean their liability to promote the happiness of all mankind – this religion is common to all mankind" (tr. Najjar in Averroes, *Faith and Reason* [above, n. 5], p. 103; Arabic in *Manāḥiḡ al-adilla*, p. 220.13-14 Qāsim).

<sup>60</sup> Muḥammad Ibn Tūmart, *Le livre de Mohammed ibn Toumert, mahdi des Almohades*, Texte arabe accompagné de notices biographiques et d'une introduction par I. Goldziher, P. Fontana, Algiers 1903, pp. 47.13-14, 230.3.

